ALL-STORY

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Let Him Win Me!

"You promised me an answer to-night. Is it—yes?"

Another girl's wedding ring, another girl's lover! Pride pointed the way, but—

By Ethel Le Compte

"YOU could win the heart of any man!"

Erica Emory had grown accustomed to hearing this extravagant statement from her friends, who backed it up by praising her violet blue eyes, her pale gold curls, her alluring smile, her naïve charm and her fragile appearance. She had been told so often and by so many people that she could make any man love her that she grew to believe it herself.

Otherwise, she never would have said yes to Kain Shedden when he proposed marriage, but did not offer love.

Erica had first met the tall, dark, sun-tanned young man from Wyoming when he came in to buy flowers for another girl about two weeks before.

On the very day of his arrival in New York, he had entered the smart Fifth Avenue florist's shop where Erica, by the magic of her smile and the concerned interest of her silver-sweet voice, sold roses to a customer who had thought to buy only carnations, orchids to a would-be rose purchaser. Erica's technique brought her employer many an extra shekel, and he paid her accordingly, and rarely even visited the well-managed shop.

Kain, his handsome face alight with the smile of the happy and eager lover, had burst into the shop that sunny day seeking red roses. Red roses were just what Erica sold him. He spoke with a soft, musical drawl, but she recognized the I-want-what-I-ask-for quality in his voice.

He came back the next afternoon looking bewildered and unhappy. Erica's heart ached for him, but she gave him the gay smile she kept for customers who may favor the shop shortly with a large wedding order.

This time the tall young man ordered simply roses. As he did not specify the color, Erica sold him her latest pets, the gorgeous scarlet orange and rich yellow Talisman.

"These," she said, picking them up with her tapering white fingers, "are just right for a lovely brunette lady, don't you think?"

"They are," her customer agreed listlessly. "Will you please have them delivered to Miss Lema Grey, Hotel Barclay?"

Erica indicated the cards and envelopes on the desk. On a card he scribbled merely: "Speedy recovery, love, Kain."

He hurried away without another word. Erica, as she arranged the brilliant roses with loving care, wondered. Yesterday he had been bubbling over with life and eager confidences, and had marched out bearing his gift of roses as if it were a banner. To-day, he was subdued, talked not at all, and had his roses sent. If, as the message indicated, his fiancée was merely ill, he would not have looked so dazed and been so taciturn.

THE following morning, while Erica was filling vases with fresh blooms in the rear of the screen of great mimosa plants, Kain Shedden came in accompanied by a merry-looking youth with a bold and roving eye. The Westerner looked positively ill and quite bemused, Erica saw with concern.

Before she could empty her hands of flowers, the youth, evidently thinking the store deserted, began to talk. What he said not only decided Erica to remain hidden a while, but gave her added information regarding Kain Shedden and his affairs.

"I tell you, Kain," the youth was saying hotly, "Lema is just stringing you along, afraid to tell you the truth. She's no more ill than I am. She could see you if she cared to. I bet you a sawbuck that she was out with Craig Porter last night and not—"

"I'm not listening to any more," cut in the other angrily. "If I didn't think a powerful lot of you, Breakey, I'd punch your fool head for talking that way."

Breakey shrugged. "Well, punch my head for saying this then: Lema began to try to hook Porter a long time ago

and it was no go. But as soon as she began to sport that big sparkler you sent her—well, you know how it is with that type of man. Demand raises the value of an object. Because Lema belonged to another man, Porter suddenly awakened to her charm and beauty."

Kain Shedden's silencing roar made Erica drop a vase.

It took some effort to attain her professional smile, but she did and emerged from behind the mimosa wearing it.

"Good morning," Erica greeted her customer, with a side glance at his friend.

The Westerner returned the greeting politely. The other returned the side glance and added a cheery grin for good measure.

Again Kain Shedden sent roses to Lema Grey.

At intervals after that the young man from Wyoming came in to buy flowers. Each time he looked more haggard, more hurt, more bewildered. Erica's sympathy was so great that she laid aside her professional manner and smiled to greet him as a friend. Kain never even noticed the change. Since he had first met Lema Grey at the Park Avenue home of Mrs. Fonell, the beautiful mother of his friend Bill of the Molliam Ranch, he had never really looked at another girl.

THE morning that he stumbled into the little shop, disheveled, wild of eye, almost gray under his tan, Erica thanked heaven it was too early for other customers, and piloted him gently to the seat behind the mimosas. There he sat, gazing silently into space. For a while Erica went about her early morning tasks, heartsick.

Desperate cases, she finally decided, need desperate measures.

Thorns had pricked Erica's delicate white hands so often that she had grown used to it. This morning, however, the stab of a thorn made her cry out sharply, and then regard the tiny drop of blood on her hand as if it were a mortal wound.

Her ruse brought the desired result. The young man started out of his trance and offered first aid. Ten minutes later Erica's "wound" had been washed at the sink in the back room, and was "not hurting a bit, thank you" and she was in possession of the facts of Kain Shedden's life, courtship and jilting.

Lema Grey had told him over the telephone the night before that she was going to marry Craig Porter. His ring had been returned an hour later by a messenger boy. He wasn't at all sure where he had spent the intervening hours. He remembered that he had left Mrs. Fonell's apartment, where he had been staying, and had taken Breakey Marceau's car which he had seen standing in the court. At dawn he had found himself so far out in the country that it had taken him until now to return.

"I can't imagine," he concluded heavily, "why I came in here at all. I've no reason to buy flowers now—or ever."

Which was far from complimentary and far from what Erica had hoped he would say. But she managed a laugh and told him: "You're too young to talk like that. There are plenty of other girls, y'know."

"Not for me," gloomed Kain. "I'm off women for life."

"Sentiment of that kind went out with hooped skirts, velvet breeches and powdered wigs!"

"Truths like that will never go out as long as women are faithless and cruel." He gulped down a glass of cold water. "I reckon I'd best sashay along now, Miss —"

"Emory," Erica supplied. "Erica Emory."

"Good-by, Miss Emory, and thank you for your interest and patience. I hope your hand gets well soon."

"Thank you. Are—are you leaving New York to-day?"

"I sure am," he answered emphatically. "Thank God, I've my valley back of those old mountains to go to."

"How I'd love to take a trip to Wyoming. Even to see the 'great open spaces' in the talkies is wonderful," she sighed, glancing up at him through the golden curtain of her lashes.

It was, however, the speech and not the glance that awakened Kain's interest. His gray eyes saw Erica for the first time, and he frowned.

"If you don't mind my saying so," he drawled, "Wyoming would make a new being out of you, Miss Emory. New York and working isn't helping you any. You look mighty puny to me, little lady."

Erica, her heart beating to suffocation, assumed her most droopy pose and her most wistful expression and felt thankful that she had not used any rouge that morning.

"I'm not very strong," she confided with a little catch in her breath, but earnestly and in all truth. "But it's either work or starve. I've been on my own for three years now; that is, since I was sixteen. Finishing school at night rather took it out of me. But I've done fairly well. I earn more money than most girls of my age, and am saving up to buy a place in the country where I can raise flowers to sell the retail trade, and where I can live in the open. It's only my ambition and my hope that keep me going," she concluded, her pose quite forgotten.

The young man had been regarding her with an odd expression while she had been speaking. "I'll come in this afternoon to tell you good-by," he said and took an abrupt departure.

WHEN he did come in, it was not to say farewell, but to ask her to marry him.

"I'm not a great bargain," he concluded with an attempt to joke, "but I can give you a good home in a fine land. I'll treat you kindly and take care of you as if you were my little sister. Think it over, Miss Erica. I'll come back for my answer to-morrow afternoon."

Erica lay awake in her tiny apartment long into the night. She had had many beaux in her short life, and a few proposals from those she had encouraged. The knowledge that she had inherited her mother's delicate constitution had deterred her from accepting any one of these, even though she had longed for a real home and security. Besides, she had never truly loved any one before she met Kain Shedden—oh, she admitted there in the dark that she really did love him! Loved him enough to test the oft-repeated statement of her friends regarding her conquests.

Because she did love him, and because of her faith in her own power, Erica promised to marry Kain, even though there had been no mention of love in his proposal.

She had given him her address and he had come to her apartment for his answer. Erica, haggard from her sleepless night and long work day, looked very much in need of the Western haven he had offered her. She looked, too, very lovely and appealing

in her delicately be-flowered, sleeveless georgette frock.

She motioned him to the only chair in the little living room that looked capable of supporting his weight, and settled herself gracefully among the gay cushions on the daybed. For a while they talked stiltedly of the weather and of New York, each shying away from the subject that had brought them together.

"What do you think of my little home?" Erica asked smiling.

"It's right neat and mighty pretty," he answered politely.

"It must seem like a playhouse to you," she laughed. "Do tell me about your home."

"I inherited the ranch from an old bachelor uncle; it's a big, rambling barn of a place. Last year I had improvements made, and had Molly Fonell send me rugs and curtains to make it suitable for—for a lady." He uttered the last words softly.

Erica busied herself plumping up her cushions and arranging the soft folds of her gown until he went on: "It's the country that makes it all worth while; the mountains, heavily timbered and with snow caps, the lakes, blue as"—he looked at her with a quick smile—"your eyes, and the rushing rivers. The Shed-on Ranch is in the lower valley of the Ames River, the house itself is built on a sort of half circle of land made by a loop of the river."

"It must be simply perfect," breathed Erica.

"It is," agreed Kain simply. "We're shut in by the mountain ranges and live in a little world of our own."

"We?" questioned Erica interestedly.

"In the upper valley—there's a noisy waterfall between that and my valley—is the Molliam Ranch, owned by Molly's son Bill. He has a mighty pretty wife and a husky baby boy. Alice Fonell was Miss Ames, and her dad owned the whole valley. He sold part of it to Bill while she was away at school. When he died he left the other part to Alice and her sister Rose, who is the elder. She's married to Henry Fenton and they live on the R-Bar-A, Rose-bar-Alice, y'see. Rose is fat, forty and a drugstore blonde, but aces up and we all adore her. Even Henry whom she henpecks unmercifully." Kain chuckled.

Erica blessed the unknown Rose in her heart for being able to make this heartbroken man forget his hurt.

Kain went on: "Farther up the valley is the Circle F Ranch, owned by Wallis Frandin. Averil, his wife, is a Montana beauty. They have a brand new baby—I forget if it's a he or a she.

"Up nearer the foothills is the Tremaine Ranch. When old man Tremaine died, he left it to his granddaughter, Jetta, who married an artist from the East, Nace Maxon. Then there are more distant neighbors: the Talbots, the Steels, and Doc Mills. There are plenty of ranch hands, wranglers, top-riders, riding bosses and oh, the Chinks. What should we do without our Chink cooks who see that we eat and order our lives rightly!" A second chuckle punctuated this.

"It's really a tiny world, isolated and simple and friendly," Kain concluded. "But I—we all love it and want no other."

"It sounds like heaven—seventh heaven to me," Erica said softly.

"It is—could be just that." Kain lit a cigarette and stared at the flaming match so long that it scorched his

fingers. In a voice that sounded as if he were talking over a lump in his throat, he spoke his arresting thought aloud: "To a city-bred girl, life out there would be mighty empty with only scenery cluttering up the place and—"

"But you'd be there," burst out Erica, adding hurriedly: "I mean, there'd be all these nice friends of yours and the Chinks and the horses and cattle." Her voice was unsteady, but she dimpled up at Kain so that he would be sure to know that she was joking. You just can't let a man who is indifferent to you, know that you consider the spot where he happens to be, Paradise. That he means more than all the rest of the world put together. That, in short, you love him. That is, you can't until you win his love.

"They'd be enough for a Western girl," Kain said. "But—"

His voice trailed off and he leaned back in his chair, too far away in thought even to remember to smoke. Erica knew as well as if he had put it in words that Lema Grey had made the isolation of his home her excuse, one of her excuses, for jilting him.

ERICA, sitting there in the intimacy of that tiny, familiar room with the only man she had ever loved, felt more lonely than she had ever felt in all her nineteen years, excepting only the day they told her that her mother had died. A pang of longing for that mother and her counsel shot through her. She turned her misted eyes to the photograph of a pretty, wistful girl wearing a "fluffy ruffle" dress, smart in the early years of the century. Then her gaze came back to rest on the long, lean Westerner. Her impulse was to reach out and touch him, to bring his thoughts back to her. She wanted to draw him into her arms, to rest against his breast, to let her fingers smooth his hard, bronzed cheek, his rough, dark locks, to draw that handsome, brooding face down to hers, to feel the thrill and sting of his kiss. Surely love and desire as great as hers could awaken a like emotion in him—

Suddenly self-contempt awoke in her. Hot as had been her surging longings, her shame and mental self-denunciations were hotter.

A little laugh that sounded like silver bells jangled out of tune escaped her. Kain sat up abruptly. Erica could almost see him shaking off his thoughts of another woman, forcing his attention back to her.

"Tell me the joke," he asked, but without interest.

"No joke," Erica told him. "Just a bell to wake you up."

"Sorry," he said, red under his tan. Then, abruptly:

"You promised to have an answer for me to-night. I—I do hope it is the one I want, Erica."

That was the nearest he came to tenderness, that sentence spoken softly and with sincerity. It served only to show Erica how little he was giving of the possible glamorous whole.

When he had entered the room, she had been ready to accept him. Now her thoughts milled around as they had during the long night and longer day. If she had not loved him, it would be simpler. With merely friendship, comradeship between them, she could have married him and somehow adjusted their lives to fit the relationship; but how could she, loving him, endure being with him unless he returned her love? It was unthinkable! Paradise in that valley? Hades, rather.

Her eyes, dark with suffering, gazed

at him through a film of tears. How utterly dear he was and how—miserable.

Miserable. Blindly, she clutched at the straw. She could at least cheer him up. And then another thought came—the oft-repeated assertion of her friends that she could win any man.

"You understand the situation," Kain was saying in that soft drawl of his. "I'm offering you a respected name and a pleasant home in a country that'll give you back your health. You have my sincere admiration, my deep respect; and you will have my protection as long as I live or you care to have it. If, at any time, you think better of your bargain, you are free to leave me. In any case, you'll have enough money to keep you in comfort all your life. I shall have your income settled legally."

"You—you put it rather baldly." Erica laughed nervously.

"And badly," he added. "I always was poor at soft palaver, but I am sincere, Erica." He leaned closer, his eyes on hers. "Many marriages that have been entered upon with less than we have to go on, have been successful."

"Less?" Erica could not help but ask.

"At least we have—that is, I have a warm regard for you. I admire your plucky effort to get what you want from life, despite a physical handicap. You—you don't find me exactly repulsive, do you, little girl?"

"You know I don't, but a girl wants more than—I will marry you, Kain," Erica told him, recklessly casting aside her doubts, sure that after she had let him make her his wife, she could make him her lover. "Yes, I will marry you, Kain," she repeated clearly.

With the light spring of a panther, Kain was on his feet. He drew her to him. Holding both her hands, he gazed down into her upraised face with steady eyes. Solemnly he assured her: "You'll never regret marrying me, Erica. My life will be devoted to you."

He bent and touched her forehead with his lips.

Erica trembled, and her whole body felt empty, waiting to be flooded with his love—

His warm, vital clasp loosened, and Erica's hands dropped to her side. She clenched them until her nails dug into her soft palms, but she smiled up at him.

"We'll get the license to-morrow, shall we?" he asked.

"Heavens, no!" Erica shook her bright head. "Well, we could get the license, but I've a lot of shopping to do before the ceremony. Even a bride of convenience needs a trousseau."

"Please," said Kain sharply. "Don't ever call yourself that again." He went on contritely: "Naturally, you need time to get ready, especially as we'll be far from shops. You must think me an uncouth cow-wrangler from the back of nowhere."

This Erica denied quickly, but added: "I think you'd best go now, Kain. I—I'm rather tired."

"Po' little girl," he said softly. "You'll get all the rest there is out at yo' new home. Hi Wing, my old cook, and I will baby you and feed you until you're fat and sassy." He smiled at her as if she were merely a tired child, and that was not at all the smile Erica wanted from him.

"I'll call for you at noon here," he went on. "Luncheon, license, rings."

"I must work half a day at least," Erica demurred. "I think I know a girl who'll be glad to take my job. Come to the shop at one."

Kain brushed her cheek with his lips and caught up his hat.

ERICA stood after he had gone, her fingers touching the spot he had kissed. "I'm going through with it!" she told herself fiercely.

Now that her decision was made, she felt better, and slept well. From the store the next morning she telephoned to her best friend, Nydia Noonan, a vivacious Irish beauty, who worked in the flower shop at the terminal, and had been trying to leave the drafty place for some time. Erica found that she was still of the same mind, and would be tickled pink to step into her friend's shoes.

Erica cut short her excited questions and made an appointment with her at noon. So when the owner of the Fifth Avenue shop heard that his valued clerk was leaving him, he heard also that she had a successor. He made the best of it, and, after a talk with the attractive Nydia, hired her.

After he had gone, Erica confided: "I'll need a bridesmaid pretty soon, Nydia. Want to be it?"

"Thought as much. Of course I do. Tell me everything."

Erica told her much less than that, but it was a romantic little story that Nydia drank in eagerly. When Erica had finished, she sighed and said: "Keep your eyes open for a loving Westerner for me, Rica. Tall, wide, redheaded and shy. If he can sing and play a banjo, so much the better."

"You best go to the talkies for him then," laughed Erica. "Here comes Kain," she added, her voice shaky.

Nydia's gray eyes grew round. "Always knew you'd win a winner, Rica."

The gay, admiring words made Erica wince, but she managed a smooth introduction. "Nydia is disappointed, Kain," she told him. "She expected you to wear chaps and a six-shooter, and be riding a bronc."

"If she comes out to Wyoming she'll see all that," returned Kain with a grin. "Ready, Erica?"

"First we'll stop in here," Kain said, piloting her into Kirkpatrick's. "Thought you'd like to pick out your own engagement and wedding ring."

A warm feeling stirred Erica's heart. She was to have a new ring! The thought of wearing Lema's had sickened her. She laughed at herself. Willing to take a second-hand fiancé and balking at a second-hand ring!

Erica chose a square-cut diamond in a plain platinum setting, and a narrow platinum wedding ring. Kain slipped both boxes in his waistcoat pocket. He then led Erica to Breakey's smart coupé and drove her down to the marriage license bureau.

WHEN they emerged, Kain patted his breast pocket. "One step taken," he said. "Now for the next."

"What's that?" Erica wanted to know.

"Tell you later," Kain teased. "Know how to get to the ocean? I've a longing to see it. Never have, y' know."

"He never saw the ocean!" amazed Erica. "Well, let's go!"

It seemed as if every one else had the same idea that warm afternoon, but Kain finally found parking space at Brighton Beach. For a while he gazed silently across the restless, sun-kissed waters of the Atlantic.

"Worth coming to see?" Erica asked softly.

Kain nodded. "Last year when I was East, there was always something to stop me getting here. Jupe, I'm

glad I didn't miss it this time. Funny, how you think you've seen the best this old world boasts, and then—you find you haven't. It's as overwhelming as the mountains, this ocean. I've always thought if I lost my valley I'd not want to live; but there are other places." He paused, then: "Same way with—a friend, I reckon." He caught Erica's hand in his and helped her out of the car. "Like to sit in the sun a bit?"

Erica, her cheeks scarlet, her heart beating a glad, wild tune, nodded. They chose a semi-secluded bulkhead and sat down.

Through her thin sleeve Erica felt the roughness of his homespun shoulder. Under that roughness was his tenderness, his kindness, his own dear self. Under the words he had so thoughtfully uttered was, she felt sure, the tender, kind wish to let her know that even if he had lost his true love she was not without appeal to him, and had her own niche in his heart and life. That was something, at least, to start with. In time— Hastily she halted her thought's perilous flight.

Kain was fumbling in his pocket. Before she realized his intention he had slipped the engagement ring on her finger. He bent and kissed the finger, then regarded it critically.

"Away from the others the stone doesn't look so small. I wanted that big one for you, but this is the ring for your hand."

"You love her, but—you are asking me to marry you?" she said, slowly

"I know my hands better'n you," Erica managed in shaky tones. "Now let's go to tea somewhere so I can display it."

Manlike, he resented her haste to end the little ceremony, and frowned, not knowing that Erica had made the suggestion because she felt that she

was on the verge of betraying her secret.

They drove away from the ocean in silence.

"I know just the place for tea," Erica exclaimed as they turned out of the Parkway. With her directing, Kain presently drew up to the Bossert Hotel. On the Marine Roof, from which they could see the busy harbor, the Statue of Liberty, and New York's famous sky line, they had iced tea and cakes.

"You were inspired to think of this," enthused Kain.

"Oh, I have my moments," Erica confessed modestly.

"You have," agreed Kain with finality. He studied her pale, flower-like face thoughtfully. Her eyes, trying to be confident, to be proud, to be indifferent, met his for a second, and then, lest he read her failure, dropped to the harbor scene.

"Molly wants me to bring you to dinner to-night," Kain said as they edged through the traffic on the bridge.

"I was planning to have you to dinner at my dugout," said Erica, adding lightly: "But we'll have plenty dinners *á deux*."

Kain frowned. "I'll call for you at seven," he said shortly.

WHEN he dropped her at her apartment, Erica stopped only long enough to dash upstairs and freshen up a bit. It took her only a few minutes on the subway to get to a shop close to where she used to work. She had never bought a gown there before, but now she was willing to spend all her hand bag contained, her salary for a week and a half and twenty dollars besides, for a dinner gown worthy of Kain Shedden's fiancée.

"The dress you had in the window yesterday," she said to the saleswoman. "The orchid silk and tulle—"

"Gowns, third floor, madame," the woman directed.

There they found the gown that had attracted Erica when she had no thought of buying anything so expensive and exquisite. With it on she faced herself in the great triplicate mirrors. Never in all her life had she looked so beautiful. Color, style, and fit were just right. It was nothing short of a miracle! But it nearly emptied her purse.

A frantic dash home. Yes, the carefully wrapped silver slippers from last winter would do. Thank Heaven for naturally curly hair! Bless granny for that old Paisley shawl!

Off came her clothes. On went the warm water in her bath. Ten restful minutes in that, followed by an icy shower, and she was dressing in a lacy frock that cooled and invigorated her.

When Kain came at seven, with—another miracle—a single, perfect orchid, he found a different Erica than he had ever seen. Exquisite in every detail, with her piquant little face made up just enough to enhance its natural beauty, she was fit to grace the Park Avenue apartment to which he took her, and fit to be his mate.

He regarded her with a puzzled look, that became, when he introduced her to Mrs. Fonell, one of pride.

Erica liked dainty Molly Fonell from the first. The elder woman, after a long, intent scrutiny, under which Erica flushed, but which she did not resent, smiled warmly and clasped both the girl's slim hands in hers.

"It was nice of you to come, my dear," she said, as if pleased. Then, over her slim, bare shoulder to Kain, handsome in his evening clothes: "She

is very lovely, my boy, and you are very—lucky. Run along out to Breakey. He's mixing cocktails. Erica and I want to get acquainted."

She piloted her guest across the foyer into her bedroom. Erica caught her breath at the perfection of the room. As she slipped off her shawl, she caught a glimpse of herself in a long mirror. She drew a breath of thankfulness that she had broken away from her habitual frugality and bought this expensive gown. She went closer to the mirror and patted her shining curls. Even this dream of a dress could not have made her look as she did were it not for her natural assets; her fresh, girlish beauty, and slim figure that might have been a boy's—almost.

Still, the dress had changed her personality as subtly as it had changed her appearance. It lent her assurance, awoke in her a determination to live up to her friends' boast. She would win Kain Shedden's heart as she had won his hand, win his every last thought away from that other girl!

Back in the handsome living room—Erica had a natural appreciation for its charm and perfection—Molly Fonell drew her down onto a divan before the large window through which blew a soft, summer night breeze. A few kindly, soft-spoken, adroit questions and Mrs. Fonell was in possession of the romantic story of Erica and Kain. Kain, she said, had told her the main facts, but leave it to a man to omit the important parts!

"I was terribly afraid," she went on thoughtfully, "that Kain was making a spite marriage; now I am sure it is a case of a heart caught on the rebound."

Erica, her heart pounding, her face rosy, asked anxiously: "Do you really think that, Mrs. Fonell?"

"I am sure of it. You are exquisite, my dear, and besides, so much more than just that. You have personality, charm, allure, glamour. Why, my dear child, you could win the heart of any man!"

Again the familiar phrase, this time from one who knew. Erica smiled rapturously, assured that she was doing right.

Mrs. Fonell went on: "And you love Kain. I can see it in your sweet eyes! Ah, a girl who can blush in this day and age!" She laid a tender hand on Erica's bare arm. "Between you and me," she said in a low voice, "I'm delighted that Kain is not marrying that little cat, Lema Grey. I sound like a cat myself, I suppose, but—"

SHE stopped short as the two young men appeared. Breakey had a cocktail shaker wrapped in a napkin; Kain a tray with glasses and a plate of tiny caviar sandwiches.

To the music of the radio, Breakey shook his cocktails and proceeded to pour them out. "Pink, pretty, and mild enough for little girls playing grown-ups," he recommended, offering Erica the tray. "Not so, Molly?"

"So," confirmed Molly. Then: "Health to our nearly wedded!"

The dinner that followed was a merry little meal. It was also, Erica realized, perfectly cooked and perfectly served. Erica, in her magic gown, that had given her that strange, new confidence, felt quite at her ease at this, her first formal dinner party. Her hostess's kind glances, the rather startled ones of her fiancé, and the bold admiration in Breakey's merry eyes, all had their influence upon her. She was accustomed, of course, to attention from her many friends, compliments from her customers with whom

she was popular, but none had been as heady as this new sensation.

Even while her interest seemed to be in the conversation, and in returning some of Breakey's badinage, Erica's thoughts were on herself and her new disturbing emotions. Suddenly it came to her! The old slogan that she could win any man went into the scrap heap. A new one took its place. That new one was: "Let him win me!"

Up went her little head, out went her chin, a certain truculence flashed in her blue eyes as she met Kain's glance.

"Have you set the day, Erica?" Mrs. Fonell's question startled Erica and drew her eyes to the speaker.

It was Kain who answered: "It mustn't be later than next Thursday, for I must be back in Wyoming by the first."

Erica, in her new armor of assurance, said: "Well, you don't *have* to be married, you know, Kain."

"Oh, yes, I do," returned Kain with finality. "You're not getting cold feet, are you, Erica?"

"Oh, no, but I don't see how I can get ready in time."

"I'll help," offered Molly and Breakey in unison.

"I wish I could," said Kain. "But I'd just be a nuisance. Besides, I have to attend to business connected with the ranch and commissions for my neighbors."

Before Erica left it had been arranged that Molly and Breakey should meet her the following noon.

As Kain and she drove home, he said: "There's one way, at least, that I can help the good work along." From his wallet he took a thick wad of bills. "You'll need—"

Erica cut in sharply: "Thank you, but I have my savings."

Abashed, he put the money away and murmured: "I'm sorry."

Erica and Breakey were much together during the days that followed. Mrs. Fonell accompanied Erica as often as possible, but she was a popular and busy woman, and it was difficult to get out of her engagements. It was Breakey who found a purchaser for Erica's apartment lease and furniture; who drove her here and there; who lunched with her, and sometimes even shopped with her. When she asked him to dine with her and Kain, he refused with: "Two's company, eh, Kain?" Before Kain could answer, Erica declared that she and Kain would soon be having plenty of dinners alone.

Kain frowned as he had the other time she made the same remark.

When the three did dine together, it was Breakey who did most of the talking, and who fussed about the food and service. Breakey, playing with fire and getting burned, too.

JUST a month from the day he had come in to buy roses for Lema Grey, Kain Shedden married Erica Emory in the Little Church Around the Corner. Nydia Noonan was maid of honor; Breakey Marceau best man. Mrs. Fonell and many of Erica's friends were there. The bride looked pale but stunning in her smart traveling suit of blue soft crepy wool with a tiny collar of ermine, and a white silk blouse with a beaded neckline. Her hat was a chic turban of blue cire straw with a soft magpie bow. Blue pumps and a bag to match completed the charming effect.

After a wedding breakfast at Mrs. Fonell's, Mr. and Mrs. Kain Shedden left for their Western home. In their drawing-room on the Twentieth Cen-

tury, they found last minute gifts from Breakey. Flowers, books, magazines, chocolates, and a tender, brotherly letter for the bride. Cigarettes, books, and a letter of the "heavy father" type for the bridegroom. That letter held threats of dire punishment to the addressee if he did not make his bride happy.

Kain, with a grin, showed the letter to Erica. She read it unsmilingly. Though Breakey thought his secret well hidden, Erica knew that the man she wanted for a big brother had fallen in love with her, while the man she loved was content to be merely a big brother. Well, she had dismissed the idea of doing the wooing. Let him do that—if he wanted to.

During the trip she was the ideal companion, interested in every new sight, but not gushing nor exacting. An hour in the observation car, then her first dinner on a train. Returning to their room, Erica found the two berths made up. When Kain came in from the smoking car his bride was apparently asleep in the lower berth.

Despite the novelty of sleeping on a train, the turmoil of her mind, and the chaos of her emotions, Erica fell into a sound slumber. Some time in the early morning she awakened and started up with a cry. Instantly there was a stir in the berth above her and Kain asked anxiously if she were all right.

Erica's lips answered: "Quite all right, thank you." But her heart's answer would have been: "I'm lonely for you, beloved."

At dawn she dressed without arousing Kain and went back to the observation car to watch the sun rise. The shining rails seemed to run from under the train like molten silver singing *clickity-click, clickity-click*. They fascinated her more than the monotonous scenery. Presently Kain joined her, asking how she had slept. Well, she told him, asking him in return about his rest.

"Not so well," he replied. Then, abruptly: "Erica, I want you to make me a promise. It is to tell me if ever you love some one else; if you want your freedom."

Erica stood up and faced him. "I promise to tell you when—I do not love you," she replied, dimpling up at him pertly.

"You mean—one would think that you meant—"

"Oh, I simply meant that I'd promise," Erica told him airily.

"Fine!" He almost barked the word.

"I'm starving," Erica declared. "Breakfast before Chicago?"

"Certainly," said Kain shortly.

THE evening of their last night on the train from Chicago to Cheyenne, Erica and Kain sat out on the rear platform until very late. They were passing through a land of brooding loneliness, it seemed to Erica. There were few signs of habitation, just a light here and there in the darkness. The *clickity-click* song of the rails was louder, but it could not drown out the sounds of the frogs and insects. Through the flame of Kain's match held to his cigarette she saw his face, intent, composed, somehow happier than she had ever seen it since that first day when love for another girl had flamed in it.

Smothering the sudden pain the thought caused her, she said:

"Happy to be back in your own country again, Kain?"

"I hope you will be as happy here as I have been, my dear," he answered. "I feel that you will find happiness

and health and roses for your cheeks, too."

For the first time she mentioned the tabooed name. "Have your neighbors seen Miss Grey's photograph?" she asked.

"Luckily, no," Kain replied. "I've never even told them her name for some reason. I think now it was because I never felt quite sure of her."

"Left yourself a loophole, so to speak, for just what you did. Get a substitute." Erica could not keep the bitterness out of her voice.

"I did not try to deceive you," Kain reminded her gently.

Erica got up and hurried through the car to her compartment. When Kain came in she pretended to be asleep.

She awakened to a land of enchantment, feeling an exhilaration that she had never known before. Through virgin forests, over great divides the train made its way. Over winding tumultuous rivers. Across vast meadow lands, watched over by the distant mountains. Beside cobalt lakes that lay like jewels in green settings of pines.

The train hesitated at their station long enough for them to alight and their trunks to be taken off. They were immediately hailed by a tall, dark man wearing well-cut riding clothes, whom Kain introduced as Bill Fonell. After the first greetings, Fonell demanded: "How's Molly?"

"Fine," Kain assured him, "and doing her stuff as usual." He pointed to a crated, corrugated box of immense proportions which was with their other baggage. "Female finery for the gang."

"Bless her heart," cried Fonell. "Bound not to let our girls go to seed." He spoke to Kain and twinkled down at Erica.

A burly, but graceful young man with flaming red hair, face scarcely less red, dressed in regulation ranch hand clothes; orange leather chaps, plaid shirt, and bright neckerchief, but bareheaded, was moving the trunks and crated box from station to motor wagon, juggling them as if they were match boxes. At Kain's hail, he came forward with a shy grin to be introduced.

The moment Erica saw "Chey" Peters, Kain's top rider, and heard his musical drawl, she thought of Nydia. The warmth of her smile made Chey her friend for life.

Fonell led them to his parked car. From its back seat a girl with a lovely oval face framed in soft, dusky hair, jumped up with a cry of: "Surprise, children!" A small boy with eyes as brilliantly blue as his mother's scrambled out of the car crying: "S'prise, Uncle Kain. S'prise, pretty lady."

Erica felt the sting of tears, the ache of her throat as she responded to the enthusiastic welcome of Alice Fonell and small Bill. During the forty mile ride from the station, the two men in the front seat talked earnestly while the two girls in the tonneau chattered and got acquainted. Bill, junior, his part in the reception done, had fallen asleep.

WHILE her eyes drank in the grandeur of the scenery, Erica's ears listened eagerly to all Alice told her of the people who were to be her neighbors. There seemed to be a romantic story connected with each of the young married couples. In each case there had been difficulties to overcome before they found their happiness. In her heart Erica wondered if she and Kain would ever find theirs. Built on any other foundation but love,

marriage was doomed to failure, she found herself thinking despairingly. These others had had only outside interferences to combat and they had had mutal love to help them.

"You are overtired," Alice said. "I must stop my back chat."

"It isn't that," Erica told her. "Please don't think that."

"What—" Alice stopped. "There's Dr. Mills's place."

"Now we're in our valley," Alice told her presently. "Over that way is the Molliam ranch house. We follow the river trail to your new home. I hope you'll be happy there," she added impulsively.

Erica thanked her with a quick smile. How kind these Westerners were, how warm-hearted!

"Anything like you expected?" Kain asked.

"How could I imagine anything so wonderful? Do let me keep some of it for another day, though."

Erica knew now what her slogan must be: "Let him win me!"

"Oh, you'll have enough for many days. There are about forty trails that I'll show you, each one as interesting as the last. Now, we're on our own land, lady bird," he added, his voice warm with pride. "Here come the boys to meet us!"

A contingent of bronzed young men on horseback, looking as if they had just stepped out of the movies, came trotting up, shouting and waving their sombreros. They wheeled and formed an escort to the car. Kain answered their greetings in kind and Erica smiled her best smiles. Bill junior awakened and insisted upon being lifted into the saddle of one Bucky, who grinned with delight at being chosen.

It was dusk when they reached the Shed-on ranch house. There another welcome awaited them. On the wide porch were grouped girls in pretty summer dresses and young men in khaki. From around the side of the big, rambling house peeped round, yellow faces, all wearing broad grins and jabbering excitedly.

Then it seemed to Erica that she was in the midst of a whirlwind of welcome. It was some time before she could separate the component parts and meet the individuals. She was glad Kain, and then Alice, had told her so much about all these friendly people.

Rose Fenton, in whose embrace Erica had almost suffocated, now began to issue orders and finally cleared a path from the step across the porch to the door. Kain caught Erica up in his arms and, amid the shouts of his guests, carried her across the threshold of her future home. His lips touched her cheeks before he set her down.

Rosy, radiant and exquisite a bride to suit the most romantic, Erica stood in the circle of her husband's arm. Kain himself was as handsome as any Prince Charming. Not one in all that breathless, thrilled crowd dreamed that the most important element of all was missing—love. Erica, herself, carried away by the romance and glamour of her home-coming, forgot for a moment that she was an unloved bride. Still in the thrall of emotion she leaned against Kain, and his arm tightened

about her. For one wild moment she thought she would have to disclose her secret. The thought flashed through her mind that if Kain and she had been alone she could not have stopped herself. She was torn between relief that she had been saved, and longing to know what Kain's reaction would have been.

Rose, frankly wiping her eyes, announced that dinner was to be served in an hour, thus giving Mrs. Shedden —Erica smiled at the dignified name— time to bathe and rest. The rest of the party drifted away to the comfortable chairs on the porch or strolled across the grass to the river.

"Rose," said Kain, "I—I've got some things to attend to. You take Erica along inside." Before the surprised Rose could answer he was gone.

Erica's moment on the heights was over. She paled and swayed.

"You're plumb tuckered out," cried Rose. "Best I should send this gang home, I think, and let you rest." One arm about Erica, she crossed the big, dim living room and led her to a large bedroom in which was a double bed! It was plain that the room had been newly furnished, and Erica saw that Molly Fonell had had a hand in the choosing of it all.

She had a sickening feeling that she had no right here; that she was intruding, masquerading. This was another girl's room, another girl's marriage bed!

THE happenings of the next few minutes were vague. When the acrid smell of salts assailed her nostrils she found herself in her undergarments lying on the bed, with Rose's concerned face bending over her.

"How silly of me," she murmured. "I'm all right now."

"Course you are," agreed Rose. "But no dinner and dancing for you to-night, Mrs. Shedden."

"Erica," corrected the girl with a faint smile. "A hot bath and I'll be all right. If you knew how hungry I am you'd not talk of denying me dinner!"

"I meant the party dinner, my dear. It's some dinner, I can tell you. It took the united efforts of all our cooks."

"And you think you can keep me away from it?"

"Shan't if you rest half an hour," Rose conceded. "But no dancing."

"I don't dance much," Erica confessed. "Haven't been well—"

Rose cut in heartily: "On your first anniversary you'll dance every dance. Our climate and cooks 'll make a new girl out of you."

Erica's thoughts leaped forward at Rose's mention of her first anniversary. When that came would she have won Kain's love? Rather, would love have come to him and made him desirous of winning her love in return? She still stuck to her new idea: "He must win me!"

Rose, meanwhile, had a hot bath ready in the adjoining room, which was as modern as any Erica had seen in New York. Rose pointed to the equipment with almost personal pride. "Don't take a cold shower," was her parting injunction. "Don't hold with 'em at all."

Erica smiled and—disobeyed.

"I had Sin Li, your boy, in to open the trunks," Rose explained when Erica came back into the bedroom. "Tell me what you want after you lie down. I'll get the stuff out and then run along."

"No, stay, please. I can't sleep. Tell me about these happy people in

this valley of romance. Did—did any of them marry without—love?" Erica asked, trying to keep her voice light.

"Averil did—" Rose stopped abruptly. "I'm not supposed to know that. Please forget my break."

Erica said she would, but was avid for the story.

Later, when she joined her guests, her eyes lingered on the lovely face of Averil Frandin—Averil with her red-gold curls, her amber eyes. Well, if Rose had spoken truly, Averil had since found love. Merely to see her and Wallis together was proof enough.

THE chill of the night air had sent the guests indoors. Lamps and a fire had been lighted in the huge living room. The polished log walls and ceiling reflected the leaping flames in the big stone fireplace. The floor, of smooth, gray flags, was strewn with gay colored rugs and bear-skins. The homemade furniture was upholstered with skins or Indian blankets. Shotguns, Indian weapons, skins, and a few framed photographs hung on the walls. Molly Fonell had had no hand in this room, Erica decided. It was Kain's room, and she loved it.

Kain, who had been replenishing the fire, hurried toward her. He had shaved and changed to khaki, which Erica thought becoming.

"Feeling as fine as you look?" he asked, drawing her arm through his.

"Too excited even to think," Erica evaded.

Kain gave her an oblique look. "Hi Wing won't serve dinner until you come out kitchen-side to see if things suit, he says. But I know he's eaten up with curiosity." He led her through the dining room into which two tables had been crowded and set for the feast. "Tell me how you do feel?"

"Just like an impostor," burst from Erica's lips.

Kain drew in a sharp breath, his face grew rigid, his body taut.

"I have let you in for something," he lamented hoarsely. "What a selfish, blind idiot I am. To save my pride, I've—"

"I didn't mean to let you know that, Kain. It was the—oh, I can't sleep in *her* bedroom! The rest of the house is yours, but—"

"You could carry on but for the bedroom?" Kain demanded.

"I—I think so. It's not—"

The entrance of a stout, moon-faced Chinaman cut short her explanations.

"Erica," said Kain, "this is Hi Wing, the best cook living."

Erica smiled mechanically, and had the feeling that she could not fool this keen-eyed yellow man as she had her customers in the flower shop. Her lips trembled and she turned away.

"He wants you to take a look-see at the dinner," Kain told her.

In the large, immaculate, delicious smelling kitchen, Erica inspected the luscious roasted chickens and smiled at the "borrowed" Chinamen, Alice's Ah Chong, Averil's Sing Lung, and the young coolie, Sin Li, her own cook's helper.

Passing through the dining room again, Kain asked softly: "What can I do to make you happy, Erica? God knows I want to."

"Love me!" cried Erica's heart.

Her lips, however, merely smiled, and she hurried back to her guests. As they gathered around the tables, Erica looked from one to another, wondering if they would like her for herself, or just because she was Kain's choice. Soon she would find that out, then she would feel either more content or feel that she did not fit in.

To these young, healthy, out-of-doors people dinner was a serious business. There was very little talk until they returned to the living room. There they made up for lost time as Kain had had Molly's big gift box uncrated and brought in. No one had been forgotten, not even the absent babies. As Kain lifted out the packages, Erica read the names, feeling like a fairy godmother.

It was midnight when the last guest departed. The excitement that had lent Erica false strength suddenly deserted her. When Kain came in he found her curled up on a divan utterly spent. She offered no protest when he gathered her up in his arms and carried her away. Eyes closed, she neither knew nor cared whither.

"I'm putting you in my little sister's bedroom," Kain told her. "She's away at school in Chicago. You—you'll feel all right there, I know. I'm going to the little old room I've always had."

Erica did not answer, but when he put her down on a chair she opened her eyes. She felt quite content and almost happy in the dainty little room, and thanked Kain with a quick, warm smile.

"I've had your things brought in here," he said. "See if you have everything before I say good night."

Erica took a rapid inventory. "I've everything I need," she told him, then anxiously: "Do you think they—your friends—liked me?"

"Liked you? They're crazy about you."

"Then I'll get over my squeamishness."

"Good girl," applauded Kain. As he bent to kiss her good night, she stood up. The result was that his kiss reached her lips.

At the contact Erica thrilled, but she overcame her desire to make it a real kiss, and succeeded in making it a casual one. Through her lashes she saw that Kain was frowning. With a cool, "good night," she crossed to the little painted dresser with her toilet articles on it.

It seemed ages before she heard Kain's answer. As the door closed behind him, she whirled around, arms outstretched—

IT was bright daylight when Erica awakened. She had slept well, and now lay thinking of the evening and of Kain. A fresh breeze blew in the open window, bringing the pungent odors of outdoors and strange new sounds. Birds trilling, horses stamping, the river singing, Hi Wing shrilling in his own tongue and being answered in kind.

She found when she came out into the kitchen, that Kain had had breakfast and gone away on ranch work for the morning. Hi Wing served her breakfast out on the porch where she could see the curving, sparkling river. She lingered over the lucious melon, crisp bacon, toast and good coffee, thinking of her hurried, inadequate before-dashing-to-work breakfasts in New York.

Erica spent the morning unpacking and exploring the house and near-by grounds, including Hi Wing's kitchen garden. Just before noon the cook came to her and asked: "Catchee dinner allee samee outside?"

"Yes, please," Erica answered smiling.

"Hi Wing make eve'ting happy for missy allee time," the Chinaman informed her gravely. "Just ask, eh?"

When Kain came riding up on a tall bay gelding, Erica waved to him, thrill-

ing with pride at his appearance on horseback. After turning his mount over to a wrangler, he washed at the pump and joined her on the porch.

"Sleep well? Lonesome morning?" he asked anxiously.

"Slept fine. Busy morning. And you?"

"Same here. Good idea of yours to eat out here."

"Hi Wing suggested it. Don't you always?"

"Should say not. You must have him hypnotized."

"If this continues, I'll have to send to Breakey for a tea wagon."

Kain frowned. "Why?"

"Save Sin Li about a million steps and as many minutes."

"I mean why send to Breakey?"

"He told me to think of something I needed for a wedding present," Erica explained, surprised at his sharp tone and dark looks. "I'll write this afternoon. This air has given me an appetite," she added as they sat down. "Imagine filet mignon out here!"

"Why not? With thousands of cattle you can have the best. In fact, I can get you most anything you want, even a tea wagon."

Erica, apparently occupied with her luncheon, was thinking: is he jealous of me or his beloved ranch?

Aloud she said: "Hi Wing and Sin Li seem to do all the work of the house. What am I supposed to do to justify my existence?"

"Enjoy yourself, get fat and rosy. I didn't marry you to—"

"I know why you married me. But what am I—?"

"That was unkind, Erica, that slap."

"It was," agreed Erica readily. "But my question remains."

"Supervise the Chinks. Make any changes you want in the house. Drive the car until you're strong enough to ride horseback and swim. The girls play bridge a lot. We've plenty of books."

"Not much work in that program. I can't drive, ride or swim."

"I'll teach you."

"You won't have time."

"I'll make time. Another cup of coffee, please."

"Too bad we didn't bring Breakey along. He could have taken the burden off your shoulders." Erica watched him over the edge of her cup.

Again the scowl. It was of her that he was jealous!

"I can carry my own burdens," Kain snapped. "But usually teaching one's wife to swim and ride isn't considered a burden."

"Ours isn't a usual case," Erica pointed out.

Kain favored her with an odd look. "If you'll excuse me," he said with studied politeness as he rose. "Chey's waiting for me."

Remembering Nydia's request, Erica asked: "Is Chey married?"

Kain laughed shortly. "No femme'll ring Chey Peters."

Erica, knowing Nydia, smiled to herself. "'By, Kain," she said.

Between receiving telephone calls from her Western friends and writing her Eastern friends the afternoon flew. The numerous invitations she got convinced her that she had been accepted as one of the Valley of Romance crowd. She wrote to Molly about the surprise box, to Breakey about the tea wagon, to Nydia about Chey. It happened that to the last named she also spoke of the tea wagon at the end of the first page. Taking a new sheet, she wrote: "to send a tea wagon. Most important of all, though, is that I must have your photo. Send it at once, the

best you have. Later, you must come here, dear, as I—" Just there a big blot of ink spoiled the page. With an impatient ejaculation, Erica pushed it aside and took a fresh sheet.

ERICA adjusted herself to her new life quickly. She loved her new home, liked her new friends, felt herself outgrowing her inherited weakness, and learned what it really was to live. Every one spoke of the change in her appearance. She was popular for her ready sympathy, quick wit and gay spirits.

No one, except perhaps the wily old Hi Wing, would have believed that she was utterly miserable and unhappy. Her acting had been so perfect that Kain himself was fooled by it. Hence, Erica defeated her own object. Kain, believing that she was happy without his love, made no attempt to win her. He treated her as he had said he would, that is, as if she were his little sister. He was away from sun-up to noon, and from after luncheon until sundown. If he were working far up the valley or out on the range, he missed even the midday hour with her. Evenings, he found it difficult to keep awake long after dinner. Had it not been for her neighbors, Erica would have had a lonesome time of it. Alice taught her to drive the car that Kain seldom used and she went bathing in the river with them when they made up parties, but she would not try to learn to swim.

Erica had one red letter day a week. That was Sunday. Kain spent it with her, making her wildly happy with his presence and horribly unhappy by his coolness. She was alternately pleasant and unpleasant to him. On the whole, Sundays were not great successes.

It was Chey Peters who brought her Nydia's answer, little knowing the plot against his single blessedness. With a wide grin and a mumbled word, the copper-haired giant gave Erica the bundle of mail he had brought from the post office on his weekly visit, and hurried away like a frightened, oversized rabbit.

Nydia wrote at length. She would have a photograph taken, she promised, and was saving her pennies to come West next summer.

Erica was chuckling over Breakey's eight-page letter when Kain came trotting up to the porch. "Too hot to work," he informed her. "Like me to teach you to swim over in Lake Tremaine?"

Erica's heart missed a beat. Her impulse was to cast her letters to the four winds and fly to her husband. Instead she said with feigned excitement: "A letter from Breakey! Let me read it to you. It's a wow! I wish I could write the answer it deserves."

Kain came close to the rail, but did not dismount. He said: "The least word you wrote Breakey would be precious to him."

"That's encouraging!" Erica managed after a start of surprise.

"Did he send you the photo you asked for?" drawled Kain. Without waiting for an answer, he loosed the rein and trotted away, leaving Erica desolate and bewildered.

"Photo?" she repeated as she made her way to her dim, cool bedroom. Breakey's letter had lost its interest. She tossed it, half read, into her bureau drawer with Nydia's and lay down on the bed. For her smartness she had lost a happy afternoon with Kain. "Photo?" she murmured drowsily.

Suddenly it came to her and dragged her back from slumberland. Kain had found the blotted sheet asking Nydia

for her picture and thought it was a letter to Breakey! Erica chortled. Jealousy was an encouraging sign! Unable to sleep, she got up and dug out Breakey's letter. It was, as she had told Kain, a wow of a letter. But it carried a sting in its tail. Breakey had added a postscript that stung Erica to the heart.

"Lema Grey blew in this morning," he wrote. "She has broken with Craig Porter! Wanted the lowdown on Kain's wedding and on you. I must have been dropped on my head when an infant, for I had half the story told before I realized what I was saying. All pepped up, she sang out: 'Fine! It'll be easy to win my boy back if that's the how of it. Watch me do it.' Dear little Rica, hold on to that guy of yours with all four hands, for she's an ornery, dangerous female."

WHEN Kain appeared for dinner, Erica managed to act and talk naturally, while all the time her heart was in torment. All that long afternoon, she had been a prey to torturing jealousy and doubts. The thought came to her that perhaps she was making Kain suffer through jealousy of Breakey. Then she laughed. You must love before you can feel jealous. Nevertheless, she decided to clear up the Breakey situation.

With this in mind, she began: "That photo you—"

"Don't bother to explain, please," cut in Kain sharply. "It is of no interest to me."

"But I must tell you—"

Again Kain interrupted with a curt: "Please forget it."

That effectively hushed Erica.

The ringing of the telephone was a relief from the oppressive silence of the dinner table. Kain answered it. Erica heard him say: "Read it." A telegram from Lema was her first thought. Kain said no more, but after an interval hung up with a curt word of thanks.

Erica, feeling that every drop of blood in her body was hammering in her temples, searched his face as he turned. Instead of coming back to the table, he went out onto the porch. For some time he paced up and down. Erica curled up on the divan in the living room and pretended to read.

Presently, Kain came in. "I've just had a wire from a man in Cheyenne," he announced in a worried voice. "It's necessary for me to go there to see him at once."

If only it had been daylight so that she could have seen his face! Even in the dim light of the shaded lamps it looked drawn.

"Can I go with you?" Erica asked, peering at him closely.

"No trip for a woman this hot season," Kain returned so quickly that Erica knew he had been prepared for her question. "I shan't be gone long. It's an old debt he wants to settle," he added vaguely. "I'll take you to Cheyenne next fall for a real holiday."

"I don't know that I care to be left alone," resented Erica.

"You can go over to Rose's or she can come here."

"You—you really have to go?"

"I do," Kain answered gravely. "It will save me a lot of trouble."

"What is the man's name?" Erica asked suddenly.

"Jed Strong," answered Kain readily.

His pat answer relieved her somewhat. Without further questions or argument, she told him she would stay with Rose.

He left the following morning, Chey

driving him to the station. Erica decided to wait at home until Chey returned so that he could drive her to the Fenton place, although Rose had wanted to call for her.

At the moment of parting, Kain

Wanting him with her, yet agonized at his coolness, she alternately froze and melted

seemed about to say something. His farewells had been rather restrained. For the first time since he had lifted her over the threshold, he took Erica in his arms.

"Remember," he began huskily. Then he stopped. Lifting her clear of the ground, he kissed her full on the mouth, set her down and leaped into the car.

"Remember what?" called Erica frantically.

"Remember me," returned Kain and was gone.

It was late afternoon when Chey returned. Erica had packed a small suitcase and was awaiting him. He brought a packet of mail—letters, circulars, magazines. The yellow envelope of a telegram caught her eye. With a feeling of dread, she slipped it out of the binding thong. It was stamped: "Copy of telephoned telegram."

Keeping her voice steady, she told Chey not to wait, she would drive herself over to Mrs. Fenton's. In her bedroom she tore open the yellow envelope. Her fears were justified. The signature was Lema. It was dated Omaha and read: "Meet me Cheyenne Hotel Tuesday noon. Realize my mistake."

SUSPICION brings heartache; certainty plunges a dagger into the heart. With the proof in her hands that Kain had lied to her, and

was going to meet the woman he loved, Erica realized that her world had been rent in twain. Into the abyss she toppled and lay there prostrate in mind and body. She did not lose consciousness; that blessing was denied her. Her brain seemed to grow keener, and in imagination she saw Kain eagerly rushing to his rendezvous. Saw him meet Lema. Saw them melt into each other's arms. Saw Lema receive the kisses that she, herself, had longed for. Kisses—the memory of Kain's last kiss, his first real kiss on her lips, flashed like a white light through the fog of her misery. What did that kiss mean?

The flicker of hope was extinguished by cold reason. It simply meant that Kain had felt the sting of remorse. What an utter fool she was! Let Kain go to his Lema. His desertion brought to an end the insufferable torture of living close to him but not *with* him. She was young, beautiful and could and would find happiness.

Because she had not won Kain did not prove that the "you can win any man" statement was all wrong. There were plenty of other men. There was, for instance, Breakey Marceau. She remembered that tender letter he had left on the train for her. He loved her. It would not be impossible to love him, after she had made herself stop loving Kain. She would go to Breakey—

An hour after that decision was reached, Erica climbed into the car carrying her bag. In that bag there were merely toilet necessities; she had taken out the cotton dresses she had packed to take to Rose's. She had changed to her blue wool crepe traveling costume and wore her blue cire straw hat and blue shoes. In her blue bag was all that remained of her savings, enough, she thought, to get her to New York. She had left her rings in the safe in Kain's office.

The sound of her engine brought Hi Wing from the kitchen.

"Missa Chey much better dlive you to Missy Fenton," he panted. "Plenty dark now, Missy Shedden. You wait. I get him."

"I can drive," Erica told him steadily. As the car moved, she called back: "Good-by, Hi Wing, and—thank you."

The Chinaman shrilled something, but Erica kept going. Along the river road she sped until she came to the stiff upgrade and had to shift into second. She reached and passed the trail that led to the Fenton ranch house. On her left roared the waterfall; on her right reared a steep stony cliff.

Suddenly out of the darkness several huddled shapes appeared not ten feet in front of her. A group of stray cattle, her horrified eyes told her. There followed a nerve-shattering, brake-jamming instant. Then she was in the midst of the terrified, plunging, kicking cattle with her car sliding off the steep, slippery road sideways. She wrenched the right door open and tried to jump—tried too late.

"Kain," she shrieked, as she felt herself trapped. "Kain," she screamed again, as she was lifted by the rolling car and flung high into the air, and then, crash, into utter darkness.

THEY found her broken, but still breathing body less than an hour later. But for Hi Wing, they would have found her too late. Sure that something was wrong with his gentle little mistress, he telephoned Mrs. Fenton fifteen minutes after Erica's departure. At the end of another quarter of an hour he telephoned again. Again receiving the

answer that Mrs. Shedden had not arrived, he padded over to the bunk house for Chey Peters. He insisted that Chey take the wagon instead of riding horseback so that he could go too.

Halfway to the Fenton trail they met Henry Fenton and two of his riders, who reported that they had not seen Erica.

"Missa Chey," sputtered Hi Wing excitedly, "step on speed. We go look-see all way to station."

"Mrs. Shedden knew the Fenton turn off," Chey said, "but you never can tell what a woman'll do, though she did have more sense than most." Driving on out of earshot of the three horsemen he demanded: "Tell me what's on your mind, Hi Wing."

But neither then nor later did Hi Wing tell that, for he was loyal to his master, and felt sure that the gods would hear his petitions for the happiness of the two who, he knew, were not happy.

But when they found his unconscious mistress, Hi Wing nearly lost faith in his gods. Chey lifted her into the wagon, his face white under its bronze. Hi Wing received her and held her in his arms on that long, terrible trip to Dr. Mills's place.

Chey carried her into the doctor's small operating room, where many a life had been saved by the efficient Dr. Mills. After lying her on the table Chey stumbled out and threw himself face down on the wet grass back of the house. It was Hi Wing who, silently and efficiently, obeyed the doctor's terse orders.

At noon Tuesday, Kain Shedden strode into the lobby of the Cheyenne Hotel, his face grim and unsmiling. The tall, dark, graceful girl who awaited him there hurried forward with outstretched hands and warm greeting. Kain appeared not to notice either. Without a word he led her to a partly secluded corner.

"Just why did you come here?" he demanded angrily.

"Why, Kain, my dearest—"

Kain interrupted: "You threw me over, Lema, and—I'm staying thrown over. I'm married and I'm staying married, too."

"But I've come to tell you I've made a mistake. It's you I love, Kain, and always will. I was a fool and—"

Again Kain interrupted: "Save your heroics, please. You told me you were through. I tell you I am through."

"Why did you come here to meet me then?" panted Lema.

"To save my wife the—the trouble of meeting you."

Lema stiffened, but persisted: "You can't love that—"

"Careful!" warned Kain in a voice that made the girl cringe. "Whether I love her or not is not your concern." He stood up.

Seeing that he was leaving her, Lema cried: "But surely the fact that she loves Breakey Marceau *is* your affair?"

Kain sat down heavily, his face rigid. Quickly, Lema followed up her advantage: "Breakey told me—everything. Oh, Kain, let him have her. You can't love her, you can't, you can't!" With the reiterated words, she beat with her small hands against his chest. "You love me—me. And, dear one, I love you."

Her hands were about his neck, drawing his lips down to her eager ones. Remembering the bliss of her passionate kisses, he did not pull away, but stared down into her dark, ravishingly beautiful face, fascinated. Nearer, nearer she drew him until her

breath fanned his cheek, and the heavy, compelling fragrance of "L'Ambreine" stirred his senses.

Suddenly, through the mesh of sensuous lure, came, clarion clear, an agonized cry:

"Kain!"

A jerk of his neck and Kain was freed of the clinging arms. On his feet, he looked around wildly, so real had that cry in Erica's voice been. He called: "Yes, Erica, yes." As if impelled by a force outside of himself, he went directly to the telephone switchboard.

During the endless minutes of waiting for his connection he paced up and down, never even remembering that Lema Grey existed. For some reason which she did not understand herself, the girl refrained from approaching him.

The switchboard operator beckoned him. Without looking up she murmured: "Your central has been given instructions by a Dr. Mills—"

A hoarse appeal to the Almighty made her pause. With an effort she went on: "Dr. Mills is on the wire. Booth one, please."

Into the booth Kain stumbled and fumbled for the receiver. Then, sharp and clear, Dr. Mills's voice: "Your wife hurt auto. Calling for you, Kain. No, don't interrupt. Listen. Her life depends on you. We are going to hold the receiver to her ear; speak as if you were with her. Eyes bandaged, arms in casts, so she—damn you, you big weakling, this is no time to sob! You speak to her and speak like a sane man, or, by God, I'll shoot you on sight. Ready? Now—"

Silence. Then, a shrill scream and his name called as he had heard it agonized ages ago. From his parched lips burst an answering cry: "Erica! I—I'm here with you, darling. Erica! I'll never leave you again. I—"

Dr. Mills's voice cut in: "God, Kain, you seem to have reached her. She—she's smiling—but, oh, God, lad, if you were only here!"

"I'll be there in three hours or less. Tell Chey meet me with horses on the range. I'm flying." His voice was almost steady.

After he hung up he stood leaning against the wall in the booth for an instant. Once more his own master, he stepped out to face the world. He paid the switchboard girl and dashed across the lobby and out into the street. As he jumped into a taxi Lema caught his arm.

Fighting back a savage desire to thrust her aside forcibly, Kain spoke: "If you know what's best for you, you'll keep out of my path, Lema. I've been a"—he remembered Dr. Mills's term—"a weakling and an utter fool, but I'm over all that." He was free of her and in the cab, with the door shut, before Lema could answer or clutch him again.

"The flying field," he directed the driver. "Quick as you can."

At the flying field, his inquiry for Jed Strong brought that person running out of the huge hangar.

"Boss, is it you, you—"

Kain cut in: "Jed, you promised me once that you'd repay a little debt you owe me."

"Sure did," cried the lanky Jed, "but saving my life isn't such a darn little debt. Gee, I can see that bull yet a-comin' at me! I never c'd look at an animal again so—"

"So you learned to fly in order that you might be here when I need you," interposed Kain. "Jed, I must get to the ranch—"

Jed looked doubtful.

"Please, boss, even to think of landing near them dogies—"

"It's a matter of life and death, Jed. My wife—" He stopped, unable to speak over the ache in his throat.

Without a word, Jed piloted him to a plane out in the field.

"Get in," he ordered. "Here's a coat and helmet. She's all tuned up. We'll be at Shed-on in no time a-tall."

"Told Chey to meet us on the range. He'll have it cleared."

FROM, far-away a voice was calling to her: "Erica, I'm here, darling. Don't leave me. Stay. Stay with your boy."

It was the voice she had wanted to hear, Kain's. But now it seemed too great an effort even to tell him that she had no wish to stay, for that meant more agony, more pain. All she wanted was to die and be at rest.

But he wouldn't let her have what she wanted. He had denied her his love, she whimpered, now he denied her oblivion and peace.

Dr. Mills, haggard and nearly spent, bent over the two.

"I've done all I could," he whispered. "It's up to you, Kain."

Kain leaned closer and into Erica's ear said softly, clearly:

"I love you, Rica, only you. It was to keep Lema from bothering you that I went to see her. If you don't love me, get well for Breakey's sake. Only, stay—" his voice broke.

"I can't—"

"I can hold you, win you back even now," cried Kain fiercely.

"Win—me?" The word pierced through her pain and exhaustion.

"I'll win you back from Death himself," Kain cried wildly. "Then I'll win your love as you've won mine!"

Dr. Mills, fearing that Kain had lost his reason, grasped his arm and beckoned to Hi Wing and Rose; but an odd, bubbling sound that might have been a laugh came from his patient's lips and stayed his action.

"You—win. I—stay—" babbled Erica.

AND stay she did. During the long days of drugged semiconsciousness, while her broken body slowly mended, Erica clung to her husband as her pride never would have let her had she been herself.

Even when she was far on the road to recovery, and the morphine a thing of the past, she depended on Kain utterly. Dr. Mills, Rose, Alice, Hi Wing and the others were merely shadows that helped and sometimes bothered her with their ministrations. Only Kain was real and necessary.

Then one night disturbing thoughts pierced the fog of her consciousness and she tried to fight off sleep so that she could find the answer. At sunrise she awakened to find this nagging thought still with her.

With a little moan she turned her head until she could see across the valley to the giant, brooding mountains, their snow caps and gray granite changed to pearl, pink and gold by the first rays of the sun. "Lift thine eyes unto the mountains, whence cometh help!" Erica crooned the words, her first rational words since the accident. For some time she lay watching the changing colors of sky and mountains, her problem forgotten.

A movement behind her made her turn. There, on an old Morris chair, stretched Kain, fast asleep, with the morning light on his face. She peered closer. How thin he was; how gray and worn-looking. She tried to raise her hand to touch him, but found it

heavy with a plaster cast. Suddenly his eyes opened and he sat up and looked at her tenderly.

"Awake?" he asked in a guarded voice.

"Awake at last," Erica answered clearly.

"Thank God," burst from Kain's lips as he slipped to his knees beside her and pressed his lips to her fingertips.

"Do you mean that truly?" whispered Erica.

"Mean it? Oh, little love, after I've prayed day and night for you to be spared, isn't it right to thank God?"

"Yes." Erica turned her eyes back to the mountains. Then again to her husband. "Have you been ill?" she asked politely.

"No, but I shall be if you don't hurry and get well so I can take you home, sweetheart."

"Home?" A pause. "Shed-on?"

"Of course, Shed-on."

"But you went to get Lema, so I had to leave. What happened?"

"All that can wait, darling. It's you, Rica, whom I love and want for my wife. In your delirium you loved me; can you learn to love me now that you are awake? Do you want to be my true wife?"

"I've always loved you," Erica told him simply. "That telegram—"

"I went just to keep her from coming here. Even though you wrote to Breakey, asking for his picture and inviting him—".

Erica interrupted with the explanation of that. That done, she added: "While the sun was chasing the night away, we've been getting rid of our black doubts. The new day is here, Kain—"

"Our new life is here, our love life, my beloved wife."

"Then I do belong in this wonderful Valley of Romance! I do belong to you, Kain. I've won you!" Erica said rapturously.

"No, little love, I have won you," breathed Kain.

Erica laughed softly. "We both win!"

"Well, well," came Dr. Mills's gruff voice from the doorway. "What in time is going on here?"

"You'd be surprised!" exulted Kain.

The doctor snorted. "Nothing surprises me in this valley," he proclaimed. "Planning to go home this week, Mrs. Shedden?"

"Oh, can I?" asked Erica.

"Say she can," begged Kain.

"Chey's got some contraption rigged up on the wagon. Claims you won't feel a jolt during the whole trip. So I reckon it's safe."

Erica felt the tears start to her eyes.

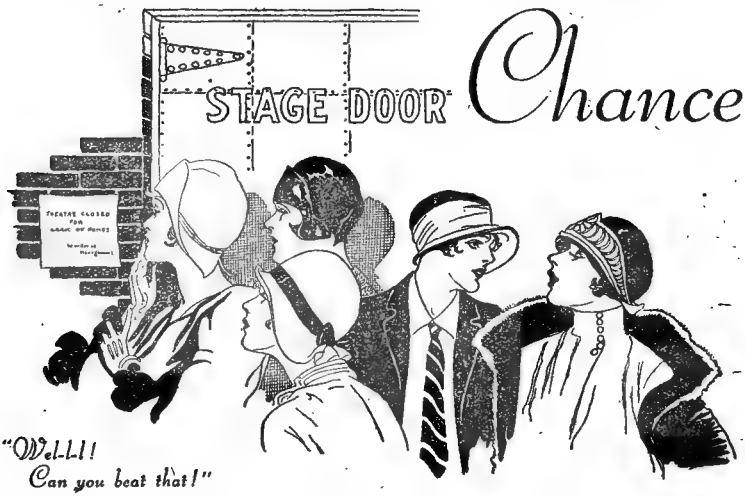
"Why, the old copperhead," said Kain huskily. "Now, ladybird, you won't have the heart to give him the jolt into matrimony you told me you'd planned for him, will you?"

"Jolt!" ejaculated the doctor. "He's not feeling anything from now on, that bucko. He's been etherized by some half pint, black haired snip that just arrived from New York—er, excuse me, Mrs. Shedden, I forgot she's a friend of yours, who heard through Mrs. Fonell you were ill. Well, Chey went to the station to meet her and—"

Dr. Mills glanced at the engrossed pair and stalked out.

Erica was able to dance on her first anniversary. Taking it by and large, it was a great day. Nydia and Chey had decided that it was as good a day as any for their own wedding.

Anne Takes a Chance



"Wel-l-l! Can you beat that!"

Because she loved him—and because she was a good sport—she did the one thing that might lose her—his love!

By Esther Melbourne Knox

"WEL-L-L-L-L! Girls! Can you tie this?"

Patsy Donovan, slim and titian-haired, by design rather than nature, was the first of the group to reach the stage door. She pushed her hat back, waved a dramatic forefinger and teetered back and forth on shabby but entirely fashionable high heels like an excited little parrakeet.

At her shrill cry the rest of the girls came up with a little rush. In dismayed silence they read the notice tacked up on the shabby panel:

THEATRE CLOSED FOR LACK OF FUNDS
By Order of Management. Joseph Weintraub

Sheila Blayne alone made no comment. She stood back a little from the rest, speculative gray eyes on that fate-

ful piece of white paper. Was this to be the end of adventure?

Sheila looked back over her brief career as a member of The Society Players with a thoughtful eye. No doubt it *did* look unspeakably cheap and shoddy to outsiders—to people who were used to butlers and boxes at the opera, to Paris gowns and expensive sports. Hard work, angry criticism and scant praise, cheap rooms, cheaper restaurants; but—her heart swelled—time to dream, independence, a life one could call one's own, and more real color, loyalty and honest-to-goodness grit than that other world even knew existed!

Sheila hadn't chosen the theater. The theater had chosen her, really, in this matter of earning her living. It was the only thing she could do, but, even so, Sheila cherished no illusions now about her acting; although once she had thought herself rather good at it in an amateur way. Joe Weintraub had given her the part solely because she had unusual style and could wear good clothes well. And he never let her forget it, either.

She could smile at it now, but her outraged pride had nearly choked her the first day at rehearsal when he had called her a "clothes horse." No, not called it, *yelled* it!

"I don't see anything to laugh at!" complained Mabel, one of the girls Sheila had made friends with. "We've got to do some fast thinking, Sheila."

"Just an old joke," explained Sheila. "You're a good little sport, Mabel!"

"Nothing else to be! Do you know, Sheila, I kind of hate leaving this town. The bathing's so grand and the sea breeze is something to write home about. It's going to be awful hot in New York! And I thought we'd get a chance to see some of the swell society crowd you read about in the newspapers," she added wistfully. "Where do you suppose they keep themselves?"

"Oh, it's a closed corporation, you see—their own parties, their own beach and all that," answered Sheila absently.

"Yeah?" murmured Mabel dreamily.

Sheila turned on her suddenly:

"You don't mean you *envy* them, you little idiot? Bunch of sheep tracking 'round from one place to another, not because they like it or want to, but because it's the thing! Wearing the same kind of clothes So-and-So does because she has more money. Marrying men that all look alike and think the same things. Mabel, you're crazy! Do you mean to tell me you'd *be* one of them, if you had the chance?"

"Try me!" grinned Mabel. "I'd trot right along in the herd, my dear, the meekest little white lamb in the fold! Who wouldn't?"

SEVERAL hours later the arrival of the troupe at the railroad station threw that place into a mild flutter of excitement. The girls took possession of it completely, reducing the ticket agent to a state of playful, many-worded exasperation as they carefully counted out the precious money for their fares.

A young man leaned up against the wall next to a window marked "Freight and Baggage." He was a good-looking young man, tall and broad-shouldered and lean. If his clothes were the least bit shabby, they were well chosen and of good quality; and if his brown face wore an expression of discouragement, it looked as though it could flash into merriment without much provocation.

"Show girls?" he asked the man at the window, somewhat indifferently.

"That's what they are!" came back

the enthusiastic retort. "Company on the rocks. Oh, boy! Looka that one, now! Hot dog!"

His sidelong glance indicated Sheila Blayne, and the young man's indifferent glance quickened into real interest as he looked. He moved away from the window, for somehow he felt a quick tinge of anger to think that a girl who looked like that should be a target for the stares and comments of station attendants.

Bill Steele—William Orin Steele, to be exact—had never had much time for girls. At college he had been too poor to rate as a campus beau and the years of travel and adventure that followed had been equally lean and packed with other interests. But he was not immune to feminine beauty, by any means. Like every other normal young man of twenty-eight, he had deep in his heart the image of the not-too-impossible-one.

At that moment Sheila looked up.

She had been half listening to a conversation between Patsy Donovan and Mabel Wilson, and a little smile of amusement crinkled the corners of her mobile, clear-cut lips.

"Look at that boy, for instance"—Patsy jerked a plucked eyebrow at Bill. "Say"—she turned indignantly to Sheila—"are you giving that stuffed shirt the glad or what, Sheila? What's wrong with him?"

For Bill had evidently been struck suddenly with an idea. He crammed his pipe decisively in the pocket of his worn tweeds and started toward them, smiling.

Sheila got her features back into a semblance of gravity with difficulty. Good heavens! She had been grinning like a perfect fool right *at* the man! But didn't he have sense enough to know—couldn't he see that she wasn't flirting? That she just thought in passing that he looked her kind? That—

BUT he had stopped before her and bowed politely, a well-bred, non-committal sort of bow from the hips. There was certainly nothing fresh about it.

"Madam," he said, addressing her gravely, "please don't think me impertinent, but am I correct in assuming that you are a member of this—er—stranded company, and that you are returning to New York in search of another job?"

"Oh, boy! Oh, boy! What a line!" Patsy's voice was low, but it carried.

"You are," replied Sheila, in a tone equally businesslike, although a faint flush rose in her cheeks as Patsy's words reached her. "But—may I ask—"

"Strictly a business proposition," amended Bill Steele hurriedly. "I have a small business here in town—a seasonal one—and I have been looking for some one to help me put a certain idea over. It's difficult to find just the right girl for what I want. I hesitated to let this opportunity slip, even at the risk of offending you—" He stopped and looked at Sheila a little helplessly.

A little imp deep in Sheila's consciousness turned a joyous handspring. "Ha!" it cried gleefully, "it wasn't just imagination, then! He felt it too!" But Sheila thrust it firmly back where it belonged and said, honestly, "Well, it is true I need a job! If you'll tell me what you have to offer, I'll—"

Out of the corner of her eye she could see Patsy and Mabel, listening with all their ears. Everything that was sane and sensible and cautious in Sheila's make-up suddenly took wings and flew away. And everything that was adventurous and gay and reckless

scrambled gleefully into the driver's seat. Romance wasn't dead!

She finished her sentence demurely, "I'll consider it."

"We'll talk it over in my office, then," said Bill heartily.

"Oh! my ticket and my trunk and—" The train was already whistling around the bend by that time.

"Just leave everything to me." He took her ticket and trunk check. "Meet me at the office in fifteen minutes, please." Mentioning the location of the office, he was off in the direction of the ticket window.

"YOU are looking," said Bill Steele, facing Sheila across the desk that completely filled his small office, "at the most busted man in this, or for that matter, any other town!"

"And you," smiled Sheila, "are looking at the most busted girl in—ditto!"

They both laughed with ridiculous heartiness, before they realized it was not the least bit businesslike. Bill fell to drawing lines and circles on a bit of scrap paper and regarding them with a grave frown. Sheila smoothed her gloves.

"It's really not such a joke, at that," he said at length, soberly. "The proposition's briefly this, Miss Blayne. A few months ago, looking around in Central America, I got the fool notion that I could make some money on hats for beach wear. The natives make 'em. They're immense things of vivid colored, hand-woven straw—the very spirit of the tropics, somehow. To make a long story short, I bought a thousand of them, tying up what capital I could beg, borrow or steal to do so. I was positive they would go like wildfire up here at our beaches.

"Well, in New York the buyers laughed at 'em. So I came here, thinking that society people would be able to see their individuality, their charm, if business men couldn't. But did they? Miss Blayne, I have tramped this town from end to end, tried to sell the idea to every fashionable shop in town and got the cold shoulder. They're afraid! Afraid to touch 'em! Can you imagine that?

"When you saw me at the station, I had just finished persuading the freight agent to give me a few more days to pay my bill on a big consignment of them I have in the freight house there. I'm broke, busted, licked—before I even start. And why? I'm darned if I can figure it out!"

"Where did you think I'd come in?" broke in Sheila, who had been following him with sympathetic interest.

"Well, I thought you might take on the job of wearing one of the hats on the beach, to show all those frozen society buds and blossoms how really clever they are. I'd give you a commission on each—"

"Let me get this straight first," questioned Sheila crisply. "Why me?"

Bill Steele looked down at the bit of paper and drew three tiny hearts in rapid succession before he spoke shyly.

"Er—you have a way of wearing your clothes, Miss Blayne, a sort of dash, or whatever women call it, that—"

Clothes horse! Well!

"DISCOVERED again!" murmured Sheila blankly. And then, being Sheila, she laughed.

"Please, what's wrong with that?" asked Bill, so anxiously and boyishly that her heart softened in spite of her. She'd show him she was something more than a clothes horse!

Sheila shook her head. "Let's see one of 'em," she said.

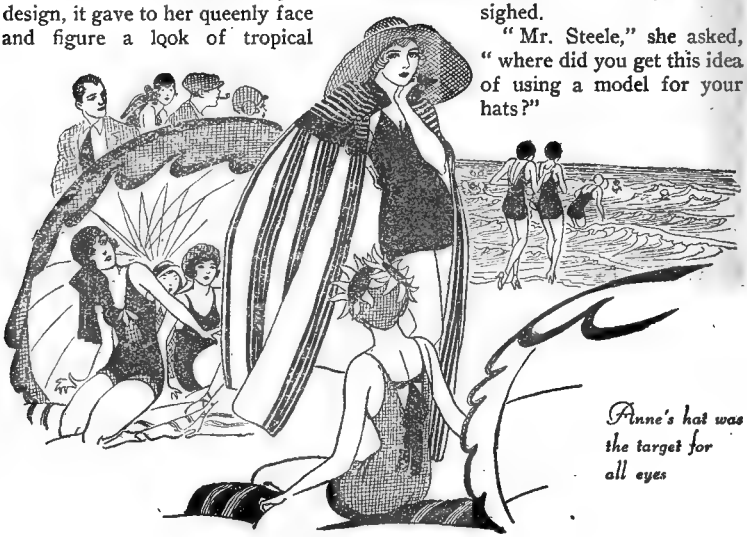
From a packing case in the corner he pulled out an enormous hat. There was no doubt about it, Sheila was adorable in it. Vivid scarlet, with a primitive design, it gave to her queenly face and figure a look of tropical languor that had all the charm of a masquerade costume. Bill nodded in utter satisfaction. This girl was an absolute knock-out! He had never, even in his wildest imagination, pictured any one half so lovely.

Then it was natural enough, since the beach was to be the stage for the "showing" to-morrow and business for the day was entirely transacted, for Bill to suggest that they stroll out there to look the place over. And since it was a perfect, golden afternoon, for Sheila to add that they might as well take their bathing suits along.

Presently they were stretched out in the warm sand, Sheila trim and lovely in a brief scarlet suit; Bill revealing an unexpected brawn and breadth of shoulder.

Sheila's eyes were on the horizon. A schooner, white sails set, was slipping down the curve of the world. Soon it would be out of sight. She sighed.

"Mr. Steele," she asked, "where did you get this idea of using a model for your hats?"



Anne's hat was the target for all eyes

Bill came out of his reverie with a start.

"Where? I thought I told you. One of the high-hat buyers who condescended to look at 'em told me they might go over if I could find the right person to appear in one on the beach."

"*Well!*" Sheila stood stock-still and looked at him in angry and then amused exasperation.

"That's different! You blessed innocent! Didn't you get it? She meant the right *society* girl, best family, all that! Don't you ever read the *Tatler* or any of the society columns?"

"Why, no! Why should I? I don't know any of 'em," answered Bill simply.

"Look here," Sheila's voice was firm, "you don't want me. Mr. Steele, it would be so much time wasted for an unknown actress out of a job to wear one of your hats on the beach! Why didn't I think of it! Idiot that I am!"

Bill was looking at her in dismay.

"You won't—you don't think—"

Sheila considered swiftly. She'd be a poor sport to back out now. But the penalty? Well, he'd never guess that! She could slide out from under before—

In a second a plan took shape in her mind. It was a bit breath-taking, but she plunged valiantly in. Whatever Sheila Blayne was, she was no piker.

"Bill," said Sheila, her voice very serious, "I've had a little experience as an actress. I'm a poor one I admit, but—we'll let that pass for the moment. In my trunk at the station is the best looking wardrobe you ever saw. I played the society girl in that show, you see, and I had to have the clothes. Right enough even for this place. We'll put that idea of yours over in style. I'll go to the most fashionable hotel in town and register as—as—how would the name Armitage do, Anne Armitage?"

"Who's she?"

Sheila's laugh rang out as suddenly and as merrily as a silver bell.

"You've never even heard it before? Sylvester Armitage — railroads — millions? Yachts? Villas?"

"Doesn't mean a thing to me," confessed Bill, a frown knotting his brow. "Anyway, the idea is absurd! You'd be found out in no time! I wouldn't let you take the risk." Involuntarily there had crept into his voice a tender, protective note that thrilled the girl at his side.

"We'd have time to put the hats over," she suggested softly. "With the Armitage name you could sell them for twenty-five dollars apiece. I'd almost be willing to guarantee that!"

The man drew a long breath.

"You *are* a sport!" he cried, his eyes glowing. "It's certainly not what I'd call a modest, timid idea anyway. You're a partner worth having. But, my dear child, the hotel bill alone—and anyway," he frowned as the full significance of the plan struck him, "it isn't honest. No, if I can't sell 'em on the level I'll take my licking and quit."

"Wait a minute," said Sheila reasonably. "Why isn't it honest? Isn't any good sound advertising scheme honest? You're not forcing people to buy anything they don't want, or misrepresenting your hats. You're just presenting them in a way you are *sure* will attract. The rest is up to them. And as for the Armitage name— It isn't hurting any one, is it? And the hotel bill. We won't have to pay that until I check out, and we'll have the money then!"

In the end she overrode all his objections.

The sky was beginning to bathe the gray sea in an exquisite wash of ashes of roses, and the first faint star had pricked through before Bill sprang to his feet.

"You must be chilled to the bone!" he cried remorsefully. "What a fool I am!"

He held out a firm hand to help Sheila to her feet. As she put her own cold one in it they both started at the warmth of the contact.

"I'm warm, really," she protested, in confusion, as he wrapped her silently in her beach robe.

Bill spoke little on the way back to town. That is, to his companion. To himself he said severely, at intervals,

"Steady, my boy. You've nothing to offer a girl like this. Foot loose and fancy free has always been your motto. Better stick to it!"

He left her with his head and his heart in a whirl. Was there ever such a girl before?

EARLY that evening a taxi purred smoothly through the even rows of neatly clipped firs before the Grammaton Lodge. A young lady stepped out, assured, self-possessed, and of such ultra-smartness that several heads turned interestedly as she entered the spacious, softly lit lounge.

"I'd like a suite, and my luggage attended to at once," she said to the clerk in a voice confident and demanding.

"Have you reservations, madam? Then I'm afraid that's impossible. We have no suites left. The season—" The clerk was smoothly regretful.

"The name's Armitage, Anne Armitage." Her voice was crisp and a little louder than before.

The clerk raised thin eyebrows and bowed. "Pardon me a moment, please. I'll see what can be done," he murmured, as he disappeared in the direction of the manager's office.

Sheila smiled. She was going to enjoy this. For a fleeting instant she wished the girls of The Society Players could see her now. Especially Mabel.

Part of her plan was to remain in her rooms that evening to let gossip circulate unchecked. So she asked not to be disturbed, adding that she would need a maid in the morning to unpack for her. She was surprised, therefore, a little later by a knock on the door. It was only a very small bell boy bearing an enormous florist's box.

"Didn't think you'd mind being disturbed for these," he grinned as he went out, pleased with the generous tip.

Flowers? Who could have sent them? So soon? A little apprehensive Sheila broke the green cord and searched in the crackling paper for the card.

"Just about my last cent," it announced cheerfully, in a pencil scrawl, "but these belong 'neath the little feet of the conqueror!"

Sheila turned it over quickly. The name "William Orin Steele" looked up at her like a familiar face.

Roses! A great dewy sheaf of tea roses! Their faint, penetrating fragrance filled the beautiful room.

Smiling, Sheila slipped into a soft white negligee and curled up on the chaise longue before the wide, softly curtained window. The night sky was thickly studded with stars, brilliant and glowing; the delicate scent of the gardens below mingled with the pungent breath of sea and pine. She was very lovely as she lay there, holding a pale yellow rosebud against her cheek.

AT that moment a man tossed on a hard bed in a stuffy boarding house room. He was cursing himself for being a fool. Sitting up, he smashed the hot pillow flat for the hundredth time. "The only girl in the world for me," he groaned. "What have I let her in for?"

Anne Armitage's appearance at the beach club the next morning was awaited with intense interest. She sauntered across the sands at exactly the psychological moment, just as the smart crowd was fully assembled for its morning sunbath. Her slim, scarlet clad figure and enormous hat drew every eye. The men stopped looking bored and the girls started sprightly conversations.

Anne sat down and indifferently opened her magazine.

Miss Polly Pringle stood it until she could stand it no longer.

Then she gathered her beach robe about her and started across the sand in the direction of the hat, determination in her blue eyes.

"Whew, but the sun's hot, isn't it?" she offered.

Sheila looked up and smiled.

"I'm Polly Pringle," announced the newcomer, with engaging frankness. "And I know you're Anne Armitage! We've never met for some strange reason, but it's time we fixed that up, isn't it? I know your cousin Marthe and — oh — oodles of people you do."

Anne laughed and patted the sand beside her invitingly. "I'm only here for a short stay," she admitted. "Been abroad so long I thought I'd like a look at a good old American beach for a change! When did you see Marthe last?"

"What I crave to find out," declared Polly shrewdly, going straight to the point, "is this: did you get that hat in Italy? Or where?"

"This hat?" Anne looked surprised. She put an inquiring hand to her head. "I forgot for a moment which one I had on! Why, no! Haven't these hit the shops here yet? For heaven's sake! What's wrong with the place? This is Nicaraguan. The very latest, my dear. A friend of mine picked it up for me somewhere—New York, I believe. Why, I thought the place would be positively alive with them here!"

The two men were tense, in the grip of an emotion as primitive as the jungle

"It probably will be!" declared Polly, grimly. "Yes, I'd almost be willing to bet that there isn't a doubt of it."

And Polly Pringle knew what she was talking about!

IN spite of her wish to hold herself as free from complications as possible, Sheila was drawn immediately into the gay society crowd, where everybody knew everybody else. Her popularity was inevitable. Alarmingly

so! Almost at once Mrs. Grayson-Barnett sought her out with questions—questions that demanded immediate and exact consideration.

The first morning before luncheon she sailed up to Sheila, beaming, with her hand outstretched and her lorgnette raised in gleaming appraisal.

"My dear," she gurgled, "I am Mrs. Grayson-Barnett, of the St. Louis Barnetts, you know. I know Miss Sara Armitage of Detroit. We have crossed together so many times! Such a delightful wit, Miss Sara!"

"Oh, yes, Aunt Sara," murmured Sheila politely.

"Ah, what branch of the family do you represent, Miss Armitage? Your father is?"

The lorgnette seemed to be searching out a vulnerable spot in Sheila's cool armor.

"The Boston branch," said she hastily. "The Sylvester Armitages."

At that Mrs. Grayson-Barnett looked knowing. Something almost like a wink distorted one pouched, parrotlike eye. "Indeed?" she said archly. "Then you're Anne! Anne Armitage! Well! *So* glad to know you, dear." She patted Anne's arm with a beringed old hand and added, significantly, "It seems to me—a little bird— Yes, we'll see a lot of each other, Anne. You see, I was a great oh, a *very* great friend of Parker Watson's mother!"

"Oh, Lord!" whispered Anne to herself, ruefully, as soon as she could decently break away. "What now?"

IN three days every one of the thousand hats had been sold. Other resorts were demanding them too—Southampton, Palm Beach. And at twenty-five dollars apiece, just as Sheila had predicted. Bill Steele told himself again and again that he was living in some kind of a wonderful dream.

The beach bloomed with them, like an exotic tropical garden. The most exclusive shops in town featured them in their show windows. The third day there were even cartoons of them in the daily papers! The vogue had gathered momentum like a rolling snowball.

"The only thing I'm afraid of," said Sheila Blayne, a worried little frown deepening between her smooth brows, "is that they are getting too popular! You see, the publicity—"

Sheila and Bill were having tea in a quiet little tea shop in town. They had agreed not to meet at the hotel, unless at some urgent need. More and more Bill was regretting this arrangement, for the longing to be with her constantly had grown more intense each day. The three days they had allowed themselves to put the idea over had taken swift flight.

Sheila was looking entirely feminine and adorable in a pale pink tennis frock and Bill found himself gazing at her with his heart in his eyes instead of listening to what she was saying, important as he realized it was!

Then he saw that Sheila was really worried and gave her his entire attention. Newspaper photographers, she told him, had just about deviled the life out of her! She was sure that one yesterday had got a good likeness of her. And then, there was that awful old Mrs. Grayson-Barnett! For reasons of her own Sheila had told Bill nothing of Parker Watson, Anne Armitage's millionaire fiancé.

"I'm glad to-day finishes the job!" she admitted with a sigh. Both were silent for a moment. Then Sheila leaned toward him and slipped a companionable little brown hand over his.

"Well, partner! We put it over, didn't we! The first thing I've ever done well in my life."

"There's the money end of it to fix up," began Bill reluctantly. He captured the small fingers before she could draw them away. "Are you sorry it's over, Sheila, darling?" His voice had deepened. "My dear?"

For a moment the eternal woman in her warned her to escape while there was yet time. Then she faced him bravely, her sweet lips trembling. The tangled events of the past few days, the past years, seemed but a prelude to the glowing reality of this moment.

"Bill!" she whispered.

For a long moment they looked into each other's eyes. Their surroundings faded away and Sheila knew definitely, as the man knew, that far horizons might beckon alluringly for them both in the future, but hereafter they would explore only—together!

IT was Sheila who came to herself first. Some deep instinct warned her to wait—to be fair.

"Will you—tell me the rest tonight?" she asked softly. "Why not dinner at the hotel? Our last appearance. I'm leaving directly after. I must run now!"

Just as Sheila was about to step into the elevator at the hotel a stout figure rose from a deep chair and came hurriedly toward her. It was Mrs. Grayson-Barnett, and evidently she had been watching for her. Sheila hesitated and then stood still, with a feeling of apprehension. The older woman seemed to be fairly bursting with news.

"He's here!" she announced in a dramatic whisper. Her hand was pressed romantically against her ample bosom.

"He?" echoed Sheila, inanely.

Her heart sank, but she tried to keep her voice light. Parker Watson! *Here?* So soon?

"Oh! How—thrilling!" she exclaimed. "Now, I must fly, my dear Mrs. Grayson-Barnett, to—to dress!" Anything to gain her rooms, to formulate some sort of plan!

Safely there, Sheila drew a long breath. Then she began furiously to pack. The telephone shrilled insistently, but she paid no attention to it. She went steadily ahead, smoothing and folding the dainty silken things.

An imperative knock sounded at the sitting room door, but she made no move toward it; only stood, quietly tense until the unknown knocker had moved away down the hall. Her plan had resolved itself to this: she would slip as unobtrusively as possible down to the lobby, meet Bill, and they would get away from the hotel immediately to some quiet little place where they could talk undisturbed. She could send for her things. Bill trusted her—believed in her. She would tell him the whole crazy story, the real truth about herself. She would fight to the last gun to justify his faith in her. All she needed was her chance. And she intended to have that.

The hands of the tiny jewelled clock on her dressing table pointed to seven. Bill was to meet her at seven, but she delayed purposely to make sure he was there. Standing before her long mirror, she looked at herself carefully and saw, without vanity, that she had never been more beautiful in her life. Her gown of trailing white chiffon molded her slight figure to perfection. She wore no jewels, not a ring, not a bracelet. Her small, vivid slippers were the only accent to the stark simplicity of her costume.

Catching up her short wrap of

creamy velvet, she pulled the soft folds of the deep collar shieldingly about her face. Only her eyes, black-lashed, mysterious, were visible.

BILL STEELE stood beside a feathery potted palm in the lobby of the Grammaton Lodge. Tall, eager, distinguished in his well-worn evening clothes, he was entirely unconscious of the many coquettish glances that were cast in his direction. It was dinner hour, and the lobby was filled with beautifully gowned women and their attendant black shadows. But to Bill the great, scented, softly-lit place might have been as bare and unoccupied as a barn. His eyes were on the little hall that led to the elevators. There was only one girl in the world for him. The hidden orchestra had begun to play—the throbbing strains of the "Pagan Love Song" made his throat ache with longing.

A hurrying, white-swathed figure was coming toward him on swift, crimson slippers. Bill gasped and stood still in pure delight. He had known, of course, that Sheila was lovely; but tonight she took his breath! He held out an eager hand.

"Bill." Sheila's voice was low and almost breathless. "Let's not dine here! Come. Hurry! I'll explain later!"

She drew him quickly toward the great open main door.

But a man blocked their path. A man who put a detaining hand on Sheila's arm.

"The game's up, *Anne Armitage!*" said a voice triumphantly.

Bill stiffened and squared his shoulders as he faced the stranger. They stepped back behind a row of screening greens.

"Just a moment, sir!" he ordered tersely. "Take your hands off this young lady! If Miss Blayne is in the wrong, *I* am the one who is responsible. Not she."

The man laughed amusedly.

"Miss *who?*" he asked. "Why, my dear fellow! I beg your pardon, but this young lady is my fiancée—Anne Armitage. Anne!" He turned to the girl, who stood silent between them. "Anne, dearest! I've hunted furiously for you, you little devil. And your father—well, he's been almost— He'll be here to-morrow. I ran across your picture in the roto section of the paper only this afternoon and rushed here by airplane. You'll never escape me again! What made you run away?"

He shook her arm to emphasize his feeling.

ANNE looked from one man to the other. What a contrast! Her chin had lifted, but the color did not return to her cheeks. The thing to do was to make Bill see—quickly.

"Parker," she said quietly, almost sadly, "I don't suppose a man like you could ever understand that a girl could become disgusted with being as utterly useless as I was! Fed up with being a—a—*clothes-horse!* I thought marriage was what I wanted, but—don't you see? After we were engaged I found that I had to have a chance to lead my own life first. I wanted romance, color, adventure! I was frightened by the life I saw ahead of me. And now I—"

"Who is this man, Anne?"

Parker Watson's voice rang with a note of well-bred contempt. The two men faced each other, their bodies tense. They were in the grip of an emotion as primitive as the jungle, as old as time.

Sheila stepped hastily to Parker's side. Her look was one of appeal as

she slipped her fingers around his tensed fist. The gesture was an unconscious one—she wanted to protect Bill from the insults she knew Parker was capable of when aroused.

Bill's face went white and his jaw took on an ugly line. He looked at the girl he had known as Sheila, but his eyes were the blank, glazed eyes of a perfect stranger. He was too concerned with his own misery to see the concern that flared up in hers.

Did she think she could make a fool of him? She must have been laughing at him all the time! There she stood, perfect and poised and utterly beautiful, beside the man of her choice. A man from her own world. She had had her little adventure, her little romance, and now she was ready to go back.

He bowed, ironically, to them both. He forced his voice to an even, light tone.

"I'm not the least bit important. Only a chance acquaintance, who is as fed up as you are with all this nonsense. I was mistaken in thinking that a—a clothes-horse could be a real—woman and for that I beg your pardon, Miss Armitage. Good-night! And good luck to you both!"

And he was gone.

Too quickly to hear Anne's low hurt exclamation. Too quickly to see her fluttering little gesture of appeal.

ANNE sat apathetically beside Parker Watson the next morning on the beach. She looked tired and listless and her gray eyes were shadowed and drawn. Her first impulse had been to stay in her rooms, with the shades drawn against the world, but Parker had been an awfully good sport about letting her break the engagement, and Bill's parting shot stung her pride more and more as she thought of it. She had thought him bigger than that! Of course, she would never see him again, but he might have given her a chance to explain! Even—even criminals were allowed that!

"Come on in for a swim, Anne," urged the man at her side. The blue water flashed invitingly. "Do you good!"

Anne shook her head and smiled wistfully at him. A little later, perhaps, when her heart got over this empty, bruised, strange feeling—

"You go on without me, Parker," she urged. "Look! There's Polly Pringle. She's a good sort. Go in with her. I'll be along later."

Parker rose obediently.

A shadow fell across the white sand a moment later and she looked up. Her lips parted in amazement. It was Bill. He was haggard and worn and in the bright sunlight his face had a look of acute misery that went straight to her rapidly pounding heart.

He tossed a package down beside her.

"The money," he explained. "I had intended to give it to you last night. But—after—I thought I'd throw it in the ocean; our success couldn't possibly mean anything to you. But you've earned it and you've got to take it, whether you want to or not. So here it is. It's all there. I couldn't touch a cent of it. That's all."

He started to move away, but Anne was too quick for him. She sprang to her feet. Her pride—the glorious stiff-necked Armitage independence—had melted into a frantic desire to hold him at any cost. She'd *make* him listen!

"Is that all you have to say to me?" Her voice was low and clear.

Bill nodded and shrugged.

"You've had your romance, as you

call it," he said cruelly. "We belong in different worlds, Miss Armitage."

ANNE slipped a firm little hand through his unresisting arm and marched him determinedly along the beach. Neither spoke. Not until they had reached the comparative privacy of a row of empty beach chairs did she turn him around gently to face her.

"Bill Steele," she said commandingly, "look at me! Do you really believe that? Yesterday you said you had something to tell me. Nothing's changed, I'm the same girl, and now—now I command you to tell it to me! Right now! *Look at me!*"

Slowly, almost unwillingly his eyes sought hers. The world faded into misty nothingness as they looked. Sheila Blayne or Anne Armitage—what did it matter? It was the girl who counted! Names, fortunes—there was no reality but this.

Humbly, William Orin Steele opened his arms.

A sudden, joyous shout startled them both back to attention. A man had popped up from behind the beach chairs and was setting up a black box on a tall tripod.

"Hi, there!"

He trained the camera on them firmly.

"If it isn't Miss Armitage and the guy she's going to marry. What a scoop! And look at 'em! *Hold that pose!*"

"Let's have him promoted for rare intelligence, what do you say, sweetheart?" whispered Bill, holding her tight.

Sheila struggled to free herself from the shelter of his arms.

But only temporarily.

Knowing

I KNOW there is one only heart,
That beats in sweet accord with mine;
I feel there is one only soul
To make my soul a thing divine.

But if it chance we shall not meet
Here in the ways of bird and bee,
I ever hear a whispering,
"Love lives and waits eternally!"

—*Edgar Daniel Kramer*

As he knelt beside her, trembling at her nearness, the door behind them opened

Out of the Night

A thief, an adventuress—Oh, could she make him understand why she had done it?

By Harford Wells

DELLA STEVENS trembled with excitement and fear as she slipped silently along the wide balcony which surrounded Maxton Mansions.

She compressed her lips, and strove to still the emotion of her heart, feeling a little giddy and hysterical. She pulled herself together, and stood for a moment on the threshold of one of the French doors which led out on to the veranda, and which, owing to the mild night, had been left open.

"This must be Powell's apartment!" Della thought to herself.

Breathlessly she crept across the threshold and crouched for a moment in the shadow of the curtains, panting,

her ears strained to catch the slightest sound. But she could hear nothing. Even the noise of traffic in the street below seemed to be stilled. The silence was almost painful.

She dare not switch on the electric light, but the full moon cast a brilliant beam through the windows, lending her unexpected aid.

The girl gave a little sigh of satisfaction as she realized that she was in Morton Powell's bedroom. The slim outline of the bed, a towering wardrobe, a dressing table, and the squat stem of a telephone, told her this.

The thing she had come here for was in one of the top drawers of that dressing table. Della smiled—this was easy! She crossed to the dressing table and opened the right hand top drawer. Hurriedly she rummaged, but what she sought was not there.

She tried the other. After a moment her fingers encountered a bulky packet. She gave a little sigh of relief as she drew it out.

Behind her the door opened soundlessly; a hand snapped the electric switch.

The room was bathed in brilliance. Della turned with a cry of terror, the telltale packet clenched in her hands, to meet the astonished gaze of a most attractive stranger!

"What on earth—" he gasped.

DELLA stood rooted to the spot. A wave of giddiness swept over her, and she pressed a hand to her breast. For one wild moment she contemplated the open windows and the possibility of seeking safety in flight. But her feet were rooted to the ground. She could not move. She met the stranger's accusing eyes with the stare of a rabbit hypnotized by a snake.

She was trapped!

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" His voice was hard and uncompromising.

"I—I—" She faltered, and was silent.

"Answer me!" He caught sight of the packet in her hand. "Give me that!" he said angrily. And as she obeyed, his lips curled contemptuously. "So that was it, eh? Well, I thought my dressing table was a pretty safe hiding place. Apparently it isn't! Well, there's only one way of dealing with thieves—even pretty ones!" He crossed to the telephone and lifted up the receiver.

"I'm not a thief!" Della panted suddenly. "Give me—" She stopped suddenly, remembering that she had promised to say nothing as to her true mission if she were caught by this man, Morton Powell. Bitterly she regretted that promise, but she meant to keep her word. Her lips were sealed.

"What are you going to do?" she cried suddenly.

"Phone for the police, of course!" he answered grimly. "What did you think?"

Panic seized Della. The police! Visions of a night in jail flashed before her tear-filled eyes. They might send her to prison for to-night's escapade.

"Oh, you couldn't!" she cried passionately. "You wouldn't be so cruel! Please don't send for the police!"

Her eyes were pools of blue havoc. Her red lips, warm and tempting, trembled with the emotion of her heart. Her appeal stayed his hand.

"If you will tell me who you are and why you are here!" he suggested calmly. But he laid down the instrument.

"My name is Della Stevens," she answered hurriedly. "I came here

because—because—" She bit her lip and was silent. She could say nothing because of her promise to some one else. If he knew the truth, he would exact swift retribution.

"Because what?" he asked, his gray eyes glorying in the slim loveliness of her.

"Oh, I can't tell you!" Della whispered. "I've promised, and—"

"If that is all," he began, his voice hardening, "I think I had better do as I first intended."

"No, no, please!" She moved toward him, panic in her heart. "If you only understood! Oh, I know it takes a good deal of explaining, but really I wasn't doing any harm. I'm not a thief, really. Please believe that!"

Why she should care what Morton Powell thought of her, she could not fathom. But the fact remained.

"I don't know what to think," he muttered, after a moment. "I find you in my flat with that packet in your hand, and then you tell me you are not a thief. Sounds a bit thin, doesn't it? If you could give me some kind of explanation, I—"

"I can't!" she cried miserably. "I can't tell you anything! Oh, well, send for the police! Perhaps that's the best thing to do, after all. You apparently don't believe me, and as I can't explain, you might as well get me off your hands as soon as possible."

He half lifted the receiver, then put it down, and came across to her.

"Look here, why won't you tell me everything?" he reasoned with her. "If you have any explanation, what's the good of keeping quiet? If you'd only confide in me, perhaps I could help you."

"No, I can't," she said—"I can't! So it's no use arguing!"

Suddenly a wave of sickness swept over her. The events of the past ten minutes seemed as hours, and the strain was telling. She swayed and went white, and would have fallen had he not caught her.

The thrill of those strong arms around her fanned the flame of her emotions. Dazedly she heard him speaking.

"Don't faint!" he was whispering. How lovely she was, he thought. Her nearness quickened his pulses. The scent of her golden hair went to his head like wine. Never had beauty stirred him so profoundly.

He placed her in a big armchair that stood near by; then poured out a glass of water from a carafe by the bedside and bent over her.

"Here, drink this!" he said kindly. "You'll feel better."

EVEN as he spoke the door swung open, and another girl suddenly appeared on the threshold.

"Gordon, what does this mean?" she demanded.

The man turned with a little gasp of surprise.

"Vera!" he cried.

Della stumbled to her feet, weak and dizzy. She flushed as she met the other girl's accusing gaze. Gordon! So that was what the "G" stood for. She had often wondered about the prefix to Morton Powell's name.

"Gordon, why is this girl here?" Vera repeated impatiently. "Who is she?"

The man was silent. He was conscious of a determination to shield the girl who had come so strangely into his life. Heaven knew why! He put it down to innate chivalry. He would not give her away. Yet if he didn't, how could he explain to his fiancée?

It was an impossible position. He

must speak the truth. And yet— He met Della's appealing blue eyes and a strange emotion surged within him. No, he'd be hanged if he would!

"Well, I'm waiting, Gordon!" Vera's voice was ominously calm. "Perhaps you can't explain!"

Della saw how things were going. She recognized that the man was seeking to shield her. She would not let him do that, this man whom she knew to be a rotter and a cad, this man who had all but wrecked her best friend's life with his threats.

"Please let me explain!" Della cried. "It isn't anything to do with—"

"Be quiet!" The man cut her off sharply. He turned to Vera stiffly. "I'm sorry, but I can't explain—yet!" he said coolly. "I admit that you have a right to an explanation, Vera, but at the moment I can't give it to you."

For he knew that if he told the truth, Vera would insist upon calling the police.

"Oh, so that's it!" Vera sneered. "You can't explain at the moment. No, and you won't be able to explain in the future, either!"

"Vera, can't you trust me?"

"Trust you!" Her voice was bitter. "I find you here alone at night with this strange girl, and you can offer no explanation, yet you ask me to believe in you! I'm afraid I can't oblige!"

She pulled from the third finger of her left hand the ring he had given her.

"You'd better take this back, Gordon. I don't think there's anything more to be said," she added coldly.

"Vera, you can't do this! It's impossible! If you'd only trust me! I—"

But Vera was gone, and the man was left standing in the center of the room, his fists clenched.

Dazedly he placed the ring on a table, then turned to Della. His grief so obvious that Della could not help feeling sorry for him.

"Mr. Powell," she whispered, "I'm sorry! Why wouldn't you let me explain?"

"Powell?" echoed the man. "You've made a mistake. Fane's my name—Gordon Fane."

"N-not Powell?" Della was speechless.

"No. What ever made you think that?"

"But this is No. 15 Maxton Mansions, isn't it?"

"No; No. 14!"

DELLA felt as if her whole world was toppling about her ears. This man was not Morton Powell, after all! The packet she had held in her hands was not what she wanted at all. And on top of everything, she had been the cause of breaking this man's engagement!

"Mr. Fane, please forgive me! I see it all now. Oh, I don't know what to say! I don't know what to do."

"Please keep calm," he said quietly. "Perhaps now you will be good enough to explain everything."

"Oh, I will!" she cried hurriedly, only too anxious to make amends. "I couldn't before, because I thought you were Morton Powell, and, you see, I'd promised Anne that—"

"Anne? I don't understand! Who's Anne?"

"Oh, I was a fool ever to have thought of such a thing!" Della whispered wretchedly. "But Anne and I are roommates. She's the only real friend I have, and she's been very good to me. When I lost my job, and my savings dwindled away to nothing, Anne insisted on my staying on with

her, though I wanted to move as I couldn't pay my share of the rent. But she wouldn't let me go, and insisted that I could pay her back when I got a job. I hated being in her debt—hated it! All the time I was wondering if there was some way I could do something for her in return for all she's done for me."

"Go on," Gordon Fane said quietly.

"Then my chance came," Della said quickly. "I came home to-night and found Anne in tears. Apparently Morton Powell—you've probably heard of him?"

Gordon nodded grimly. Who had not heard of Powell, involved as he had been in so many court scandals?

"Apparently he and Anne were very friendly in the old days. Then he jilted her and vanished. But she had been foolish enough to write him some letters, which he kept, and which he is now using against her.

"A few months ago he turned up again, and tried to make Anne come back to him. He didn't succeed. That infuriated him. He swore to be revenged on her for refusing his advances.

"A fortnight ago Anne became engaged, and Powell, hearing of it, rang her up and told her that unless she came to his apartment to-night for her letters he would send them direct to her fiancé.

"Anne was in a terrible way. She knew her fiancé's jealous disposition; she knew that if Powell carried out his threat her happiness would be ruined. Yet she dared not keep the appointment with Powell.

"I persuaded her to let me come, and promised not to tell Powell why I had come if he caught me in the act. You see, Anne was afraid that in that case he would carry out his threat. That was why I refused to explain just now, Mr. Fane. I thought you were Morton Powell."

"I see," Gordon Fane said quietly.

His face hardened. So Morton Powell was at the bottom of this, was he? He knew quite a lot about Powell, and nothing to that gentleman's credit.

"Well," he said at length, "some people might not believe you, but I do!"

"Oh, thank you!" Della whispered. "But I've failed!" she cried miserably. "I promised Anne I'd get those letters, and now I'm as far from getting them as I was before!"

"Not quite."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'll get those letters for you!"

"You?"

"Yes. You see, Morton Powell happens to owe me a good deal, one way and another, and if I tell him to send those letters back to their rightful owner, he'll have to do it!"

"BUT your fiancée!" Della burst out. "Let me go and tell her everything at once. She must know the truth as soon as possible."

He shook his head.

"No!" he said firmly. "She ought to have trusted me."

"But the circumstances were exceptional, Mr. Fane. Don't you see?"

"Oh, yes, I see!" he said, a little bitterly. "But I'm through! If her love for me won't stand the test, it's best that we should part, that's all. Vera means nothing to me now. I thought I loved her once. I was going through with things because I felt in honor bound. Really, I'm glad that it's ended."

"Why are you doing all this for me?" Della whispered.

He smiled, and there was something in his eyes which thrilled her through and through. Some strange, sweet message flashed between them, intelligible to both.

"Because—well, because I admire you enormously," he said at last. "You've got courage, that's all!"

But it wasn't all, and he knew it, as he led her through his apartment to the front door.

"Will you dine with me at the Ailsa Restaurant to-morrow night?" he asked abruptly.

"I should love to," she whispered shyly, "but—"

"You see," he told her, "I'll make it my business to see Powell immediately, and by to-morrow I hope I shall have those letters to give to you." He took her hand—such a slim little hand—in his big brown one, and as he did so felt an irresistible desire to kiss those warm intoxicating, cherry-red lips. "At seven thirty, then," he said gravely. "In the vestibule?"

She nodded.

"Good-by, until to-morrow!" she said softly. "And thank you—thank you a thousand times for your goodness!"

Then she was gone.

He stood for a moment at the open door, a strange look in his eyes. Then he went back to the bedroom with the vision of Della's haunting face before his gaze.

Mechanically he groped for the ring he had put upon the side table. But his fingers encountered only air. Vera's ring had vanished.

It was a valuable one, and he did not want to lose it. Hastily he searched the floor, but could find no trace of it.

After a time he rose to his feet, and his lips were set in a hard line. The ring had gone. There was no doubt about that. Who had taken it? It could not have walked off. He distinctly remembered placing it upon that side table.

It must have been stolen; and the only person who could have taken it was Della. Della? No, it was impossible. He was certain that she was no crook; that her story was true. Eyes like hers couldn't deceive. Lips like hers couldn't lie.

Then he remembered suddenly that she had not given him her address. It might, of course, be an oversight. On the other hand—suspicions crowded thick and fast. He could not doubt her after what had happened, and yet—well, he would soon find out if there was any truth in her tale. He would tax Powell with the matter right away.

Hastily he slipped out of his apartment and knocked next door.

Ten minutes later he was back, his brows knitted with anger.

He had got nothing out of Powell. The latter had denied the existence of any letters. Moreover, he had sworn he had never heard of Anne Letworth.

Gordon was convinced that Powell dared not lie to him, and the case against Della seemed black indeed.

"The little adventuress!" he muttered, between set teeth. "Got away and got the ring, too! She's fooled me, that's certain!"

DELLA entered the magnificent foyer of the Ailsa Restaurant the following evening just as the hands of the gilded clock over the entrance pointed to the half-hour.

The flimsy green chiffon frock she wore, rippling out into flared flounces with a deep "V" back, accentuated the slim lines of her figure. For months she had saved, and had finally

bought it a few days before she had received her dismissal.

At the time she had regretted the cost of it; now she was glad, because she knew she looked her best. And she wanted to look her best to-night, wanted to passionately because of Gordon Fane.

He had been in her thoughts ever since their strange, unconventional meeting of the night before. She could not banish his smiling, handsome face from her mind's eye.

Then she told herself not to be a silly, sentimental little goose, and she looked about the foyer for Gordon Fane.

He was standing by a clump of tall palms, and at sight of him Della felt a sudden thrill of anticipation. There was surprise in his gray eyes as he strode across the thickly-carpeted floor to meet her.

"The little adventuress!" he was thinking. "So she has come after all! Having tricked me once, I suppose she thinks she can do it again! We'll see!"

"You can't!" she cried. "You couldn't be so cruel!"

But his face showed nothing of his thoughts as he took her slim hand and smiled into her eyes. He offered her his arm. Della did not detect the strained look in his eyes.

The next hour passed like magic.

The Ailsa was one of the most exclusive restaurants in town, and though Gordon Fane often dined there, it was a new experience to Della, and she enjoyed every minute of it.

The man at her side could scarcely believe that this laughing girl with the flushed face and starry eyes could be the kind of girl he believed her to be. Gordon was puzzled, and his heart softened as he looked at her, despite his resolutions. Her beauty intoxicated him. Her nearness quickened his pulses. She seemed so young and innocent and adorable. Yet he knew what she was.

For the moment Della had forgotten all about the letters and her mission. She had been borne into another world —a world of light and laughter and love, a world of golden happiness, the like of which she had never known before.

She felt that she was dreaming, that she would soon wake up and know that all this joy and gayety was not for her.

But she did not intend to let this feeling spoil her evening!

At length Gordon Fane looked at his watch. "Shall we be going?" he said quietly.

She laid an impulsive hand upon his arm.

"What about the letters, Mr. Fane? I meant to ask you before, but—"

"I intend to speak about them," he answered. "But not here. We might be overheard. I'll get a taxi. We can talk on the way home."

Della thought his voice sounded a little grim, and wondered why.

FIVE minutes later they were seated in a taxi, speeding through the streets. There was silence between them. Della gazed timidly at his face. He was staring moodily before him. There was something in his manner which frightened her.

"Have you got the letters, Mr. Fane?" she asked timidly.

"No," he said suddenly; "I haven't. You know that very well!"

"I don't understand!" Della cried in dismay. Then: "Has Morton Powell sent them direct to Anne?"

"He has not! Oh, you needn't try to bluff me! The game's up, Miss Stevens. I was a fool to believe your tale last night. I know that now. You are an adventuress! I thought you were different. I was wrong!"

"I don't understand!" Della cried. "I told you the truth!"

"The truth!" he sneered. "Nothing but lies, you mean! What about the ring you stole? It's gone, and you took it. That's something else you can't understand, I suppose!"

"I didn't take your ring! I don't know anything about it!" Della's anger was rising. "How dare you accuse me! I—"

"It's no use!" he laughed harshly. "You came to my apartment last night on purpose to steal that package I hid in the dressing table. Then you were caught, so you invented that mad tale about the letters and Morton Powell. I own that was clever, and it completely deceived me until I saw Powell and heard his denial of their existence and that he had ever heard of a girl named Anne Letworth—"

"Of course he denied everything!" Della broke in scornfully. "But he has those letters, all the same!"

"I don't think so," Gordon said coolly. "He is too much afraid of me to lie. He owes me large sums of money, and if I cared to press him he would find himself in prison. No, that excuse won't wash. Then there's the missing ring."

"I tell you I don't know anything about the ring!" Della insisted. "I didn't take it. I'm not a thief!"

"Then how did it vanish? I remember placing it on the side table, and you were the only person who could have taken it!"

"Are you sure it isn't still in the room?" Della inquired, striving to keep calm though her head was splitting. She could not meet his accusing eyes. And she so wanted him to believe in her. If he didn't, then she didn't care what the rest of the world thought.

"Quite sure," he said. "I searched high and low, but the ring had gone. But you can come and look for yourself, if you like."

"I should like!" she retorted; then lapsed into silence, as Gordon tapped on the window and redirected the driver to his own apartment.

AS Gordon followed Della up the stairs to the third floor of Maxton Mansions a few moments later his manner was cold and distant. He unlocked the front door and ushered her in.

They stood in the room where he had found her the previous night.

"There's the table," Gordon Fane pointed out. "I put the ring on it. Even if it had fallen off it couldn't have rolled far. I give you ten minutes to search, then I send for the police!"

With a little moan she commenced to search. But the ring had vanished. There was no trace of it. And as the precious minutes slipped by, Della felt her courage ebbing. So this was the end of her effort to aid Anne—Anne who had been so hopeful when Della had returned home the previous night to tell her the great news.

At length she rose to her feet, still with some show of spirit.

"It isn't here!" she said. "At least I can't find it."

He made a movement toward the telephone.

"Please don't send for the police!" she implored. "You're making a mistake. I haven't seen the ring. I don't know anything about it. Oh, why can't you believe in me?"

"Because I know what you are!" he said fiercely. "You duped me last night, but you needn't think you can get away with the same game twice. Last night I believed you, pitied you. To-night things are different. I know what you really are."

"How dare you!" she cried hysterically. "How dare you! Very well, do your worst! I deserve it, I suppose, for being such a little fool! I—"

"But there's one thing I'm going to say to you!" Gordon burst out. "Last night I fell in love with you. Yes, I did! Because you seemed to be the type of girl who had never before crossed my path. I thought you were *the* girl at last. That was why I wanted to help you and protect you, even to the point of sacrificing Vera."

Della stood like one turned to stone. He had loved her last night, but now his love had turned to scorn and disillusionment. She could not bear it. She could not bear it!

"That's all!" he added fiercely. He lifted the telephone receiver.

"You can't! You can't! You wouldn't be so cruel!"

"Can't I?" Even now he felt his resolution melting away. Her pleading voice rang in his ears. He must act quickly. Lifting the receiver, he requested "Police."

In that moment Della darted from the room in panic. Fear lent her wings. In a moment she was fumbling with the latch of the front door. Then she

swung it open and hurried down the stairs and out into the streets as if all the fiends were after her. Hastily she hailed a taxi and sped toward home—and temporary safety.

EVEN as Della fled Gordon Fane put down the instrument and jumped after her. She should not escape. She should stay and face the music.

In his haste he knocked against the small table, turning it over on its side. And even as he made for the door something fell upon the pile carpet and glittered mockingly before his eyes.

The missing ring!

Gordon stooped and picked it up. He was like one turned to stone. He could see now that it had evidently lodged in some crevice under the table, and the knock he had given the piece of furniture had caused it to tumble to the ground.

And he had accused Della of taking the ring. What could he say? What could he do? He had called her a thief. He had denounced her as an adventuress; yet she was innocent. If it had not been for the missing ring, he would have believed her when she said that Morton Powell was lying. Now—

Gordon realized in that moment that he had lost the one thing in the world he wanted. He knew then that he loved Della madly, that he would do anything to make amends for the shameful way he had treated her.

The front door banged as he stood immobile. She had gone. The sound was like the death knell to reawakened hope. She had gone out of his life forever.

The glittering ring he held in his hand seemed to mock him with its beauty. He threw it to the floor with a cry of rage.

Then the telephone bell rang. He lifted the receiver impatiently.

"Hello!"

"Is that Mr. Fane?"

"Speaking!"

"Oh! This is Anne Letworth. I thought I'd ring up to thank you and say the letters had arrived safely!"

"You've got them?" Gordon's voice was incredulous.

"Yes, thanks to you. I don't know how I can ever repay you, Mr. Fane. Della told me everything."

So those letters had existed. There *was* an Anne Letworth. When he was able to think coherently again, Anne was still thanking him profusely.

"It's all right!" he answered mechanically. "You needn't thank me."

"I wish I could repay you in some way," Anne faltered.

"You can!" said Gordon suddenly. "Give me Della's address."

"Why, she lives with me." Anne gave the address.

"Good!" Gordon said thankfully. "Then I'll be around right away. But you needn't tell her that. If you could manage to be out shopping or something when I arrive, I'd be mighty grateful!"

"But I thought she was with you, Mr. Fane," Anne said, bewildered.

"You thought wrong," Gordon answered grimly. "But she soon will be!"

And with that cryptic remark, he rang off.

Even as the receiver clicked into place, a sudden thought struck Gordon, and his jaw hardened.

Supposing that had been Della ringing up under the name of the fictitious Anne? It was quite possible. One person's voice sounded much the same as another's over the phone. It might be another trick to fool him.

He thought for a moment. Then he decided to go to the address he had been given. He would be on his guard—that was all. More, he would demand to see Anne in person. And not until he had questioned her would he be satisfied.

BUT his decision was to suffer another sudden change. As he left his apartment he bumped into Morton Powell.

Powell started as he saw Gordon and his face went a little white. He thought, by the grim expression on Gordon's face, that he had discovered that he—Powell—had lied about those letters.

"It's all right, Fane," he said hurriedly. "I did have those letters of Miss Letworth's, and I've sent them back. You took me by surprise the other day. Otherwise I'd have made a clean breast of everything!"

"Is this true, Powell?" Gordon cried in astonishment.

"Perfectly!" Powell assured him.

He was watching Gordon fearfully, wondering what he was going to do. He was hardly prepared for what occurred. Gordon's expression suddenly softened. Then he was bounding down the stairs three at a time.

He hailed a taxi and told the driver to drive to Della's address. He fumed with impatience as the taxi sped through the busy streets. The vehicle was not going half fast enough for him. Every second was precious now.

Then he was running up the stairs and knocking at the door. There was no answer. He knocked again. The sound of stifled sobbing answered him. He flung open the door and entered.

"Della!" he whispered, as he stood upon the threshold. "Della, can you ever forgive me?"

She rose to her feet.

"Why have you come here?"

Her voice was scarcely above a whisper. Never had she seemed so desirable to Gordon as then. And yet he knew that he could hardly expect forgiveness for all he had said and done.

"I've come to say how sorry I am that I ever doubted you, Della!" he muttered brokenly. "I behaved like a cad. I ought to have known, ought to have realized."

"I don't understand!" she said coldly. "But you needn't explain anything. It wouldn't be any use. I never wish to see you again!"

"I've found the ring!" he told her, ignoring her words. Then he explained as best he could. "I've been a hopeless brute," he added wretchedly. "I'm sorry. Perhaps I'd better go."

He turned toward the door with bowed head. And Della was conscious of a tremendous awakening within her as she watched him. The last rags of her pride were stripped from her tortured being. She knew she could not let him go, because she loved him. And love bears all; love overcomes all; love gives everything; expecting naught in return.

"Gordon!" she whispered.

There was such a wealth of meaning in the word. It was as if the crisis of their lives had been reached. The gold of their love had been refined in the fire of anguish and misunderstanding, and she was glad, for her path had been made clear.

Gordon turned, and there was an incredulous light in his fine eyes. She wanted him. In spite of all he had said and done, she wanted him!

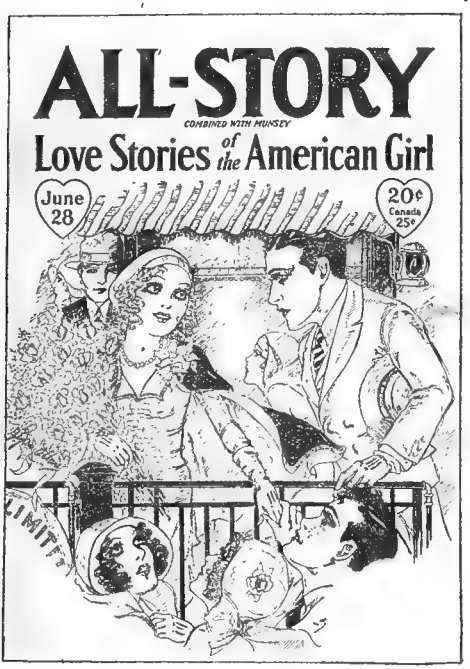
He crossed toward her, and with a rough movement caught her in his arms.

"It doesn't seem possible!" he whis-

pered. "I'm not worthy of your forgiveness, Della. Before yesterday, we had never met. To-day I feel as though I had known and loved you all my life. And I want you, Della—want you so! What I said to you an hour ago was true. I loved you the moment I saw you, and I shall go on loving you always!"

"Is it possible, Gordon?" she murmured shyly, her eyes misty with tears. "It isn't a dream?"

His eyes answered her, and she lifted her lips to his.



She felt his dark gaze upon her—

as she waved good-by to her friends. Who was this Fascinating Stranger, and would she meet him as the train carried her onward to the resort she had picked for her vacation?

Her heart beat faster as the train gave a warning whistle!

All aboard for Romance!

BETTY-LOU'S Love Quest

Betty-Lou's enthralling adventures will begin on the June 28th cover of this magazine. Don't miss the first one! Or any of the exciting ones to follow. Be sure that ALL-STORY goes with you on your own vacation where you can enjoy Betty-Lou's thrills and heart-throbs at your leisure. We only hope you will have half as glamorous a vacation as hers!

And don't forget that you can get a two-tone copy of each and every one of these lovely covers by merely sending in the coupon from each issue with a two cent stamp! Every reader will want them all, not only so that the story may be unbroken, but because the pictures are so lovely in themselves.

Remember! The first adventure, "Au Revoir, Betty-Lou," will appear on the stands JUNE 25th. Get your copy early.

"I insist that every one present be searched!" she shrilled. Jane felt Bruce start forward

The Love Game

Both Jane and Sylvia knew all the rules, but Jane played fair and Sylvia played— the oldest game in the world!

By Rita Rohan

Author of "Get Your Man!"

PRETTY Jane Daffney knew that no one at the Howtons' house party called Sylvia Porter unpopular. No, no girl as delicately fair and as daintily *spirituelle* as Sylvia could ever be alone save by her own wish. Why, even Sylvia's parents admitted that they lived in fear of the day when their darling would find the man she could care for—never the man worthy of her, for such a creature had never been born!

But pretty Jane knew differently. She knew Sylvia well, and none of the

exquisite young woman's tricks fooled her for a moment. Sylvia was out to catch big game with her sweet aloofness, her posing that made her so unlike other girls; and Jane, the Howtons' poor little cousin, who was going to business college and having rather a hard time of it generally, was desperately afraid she would succeed. Jane wanted so much from life herself, and she never had a chance to get it!

One late summer afternoon these two girls sat on the porch of the Howtons' spacious cottage in the mountains. In the distance Ivy Waters, wearing a new white sports costume saved for this occasion, vanished with the handsome young man who had arrived that morning, and about whom Ivy had been raving for weeks.

"If Arthur Bruce doesn't propose to me in this heavenly place, then I'll go into a convent and donate my dressing table to the Follies!" she had declared. "He's absolutely the catch of several seasons, and a prince of a chap to boot."

Such remarks, repeatedly made before Bruce's arrival, had roused the disgust of Jane Daffney, whose lovely brows drew together when she heard them. They had also brought lines of shocked pain to the delicately sensitive lips of Sylvia Porter. Sylvia never even looked at a man—or so every one thought; and how much of a farce that unique attitude was no one knew, except clever Jane. Sylvia had a line of her own.

It was Sylvia who spoke as Ivy disappeared with Bruce. She rarely spoke to Jane, but there seemed just then to be no one else at hand.

"Have you ever met Mr. Bruce before?" she inquired.

Jane started. From the way in which she turned her great dusky eyes upon the delicate blond face in the next chair one would infer that the less Miss Porter had to say to her the happier she would be.

As it was, she made one word do.

"Never," she said, and closed her pretty mouth firmly upon it.

"There was a scandal about an Arthur Bruce a couple of years ago," sighed Sylvia dreamily; "or perhaps I should not say a scandal. Mother and father keep these things from me so; but wasn't there the theft of a famous emerald at a house party on Long Island? I seem to recall—"

"Well, if you do, you had better forget it," snapped Jane, rising and stepping deliberately into the house.

THE other girl's voice made her think of heavy cream pouring from the lips of a little pink jug. She knew perfectly well to what Sylvia referred when she spoke of a house party on Long Island. At a prominent home there, two seasons before, an emerald pendant of fabulous value had vanished. Arthur Bruce, being a guest at the time, had had no more to do with the thing than any of the other guests; but Sylvia's few creamy words draped him in guilt.

"She's playing some sort of a game," muttered Jane indignantly, surveying her own slender figure in a near-by mirror. "Now what is it? She shan't try any of her tricks with him!"

There were tears in Jane's eyes as she said this, for she had admired Arthur Bruce from afar for many months, and during the few hours she had been near him at the Howton cottage she had found him all that a girl could wish for in a lover.

"But no such luck as that for me!" she sighed, and powdered her pretty nose.

Arthur Bruce was a regular fellow. Clear-eyed, clear-skinned, and clean-living, he carried about with him a charm that was too distinctive to be unnoticed or unfelt. He had always been tremendously popular everywhere he went. He had come to the Howtons' house party because Tom Howton was a college friend of his, and also because he had rather taken a shine to Ivy Waters.

It was nothing serious, for no one would find him tying up to a girl just yet. He had a definite picture of the future Mrs. Arthur Bruce, and Ivy did not at all resemble that ideal lady; but she was a nice kid, and it was a nice crowd.

But what was it that got into them all a couple of days after Bruce arrived? There was a chill in the air that he could not help feeling. Even the men showed it, and there was one fat chap called Porter who almost cut him.

As for Ivy Waters, she became suddenly next to unapproachable; and this was a state of affairs that Bruce had never yet encountered. She looked as if she cried a lot in secret.

There was, however, one girl, a lovely, ethereal blonde, daughter of that rude Porter chap, who was always gracious and nice to him. He saw a warm smile on her soft lips and read friendship in her serene blue eyes. After a rebuff from Ivy Waters he now and then sought Sylvia Porter and sat beside her on the picturesque veranda, or took her out canoeing on the lake.

At last he frankly accosted his host, big, kindly Tom Howton.

"Have I eaten my peas with my knife, or done anything else unpardonable?" he asked one afternoon, as the men were coming in from a fishing trip. "There's a positive chill in every one's manner."

Howton dropped his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Oh, the deuce with it!" he snapped. "A lot of tommy rot!"

Then he stamped into the house, leaving Bruce puzzled and a little angry. There *was* something! He had been right.

A FLUTTER of robin's egg blue among the trees, and Sylvia Porter came sauntering into view, a big shade hat on her fair bands of hair, her exquisite face lighting at sight of Arthur Bruce.

"What luck?" she asked with a golden smile on her lips.

"None," said Bruce shortly. Then he changed the subject. "Miss Porter, you have been nice to me ever since I came. Perhaps you can solve a mystery for me. What has everybody up here got against me?"

"Why, what could any one have against *you*, Mr. Bruce?" asked Sylvia with soft breathlessness.

"I'm asking you," said Bruce. "They've got something, and I want to know what it is."

"I am sure you must be wrong," insisted Sylvia with soft distress. "Why I, who am so much alone, who am so much misunderstood, have envied you your great popularity. I've watched Ivy and you—"

"Yes, but not both at once," interposed Bruce grimly. "Ivy can't see me any more. To be dramatic, she has condemned me unheard. Aside from that, I must find out what is wrong. There is nothing in my past or present that I am ashamed of."

"Oh, good gracious, of course not!" gasped Sylvia, wide-eyed. "I cannot help you at all. You must have seen

how this crowd lets me alone. I am apart from them, and different. I myself am accustomed to the chill you speak of, the uncongeniality that I pretend not to notice."

A soft, trembling sigh finished this touching speech.

Even Arthur Bruce, who knew girls pretty well, would never have recognized Miss Porter's pathetic position, all dressed up in words like that, as plain unpopularity. In Sylvia's case the thing that every girl dreads like the smallpox became a state of affairs which crowned her apart and far above her fellows.

But Bruce, just then, was in no mood to follow her into the exalted sphere in which she dwelt alone. He was of the earth, earthy; and at present he was completely absorbed in his effort to discover what ailed his friends the moment he joined them. This lovely being, who gazed at him with eyes that might have been filched from the summer skies, was not one to come to for the information he wanted. No! Sylvia Porter might have told him all about angels and the heavenly music of harps, or gamboling lambs and a field of snowy lilies; but he was not interested in such things.

He had noticed Jane Daffney, of course. No man could help noticing Jane; but Ivy had kept him so busy that he had had no time to get to know her. Jane was praying every hour that that time would come; and now, while Bruce's mind was still entirely taken up with the mystery that he was trying to solve, it came.

He had descended to the porch, dressed for dinner, a trifle ahead of every one else. With his brows drawn together angrily, he was striding down a path that led through picturesque rocks to the edge of the charming lake when Jane Daffney appeared before him. "Appeared" was the right word. At a turn in the path he came suddenly upon her; and it was rather a shock, considering that pretty Miss Daffney was sitting on a high rock with a needless and heedless display of silk-clad leg and foot. She was swinging both her slippered feet while she ate fudge from a plate at her side—a ruinous thing to do so near to dinner. Her charming dark head was outlined against the setting sun, and she made an exquisite picture.

Her beauty struck the angry Bruce like a slap in the face, and he frankly stared, coming to a standstill before her.

Jane lifted those marvelous lashes and stared back at him, while about her mobile lips there crept a smile which seemed to proclaim that all her life she had waited for that moment.

"Come and sit down," she invited. "This is a lovely rock."

"If you were like the rest of this crowd you would hunt up an excuse to flee at my approach," said Bruce bitterly.

"Oh!" said Miss Daffney, with a sniff. *"That!"*

Bruce flushed angrily; yet he continued to regard Jane with admiration. No one could have helped it. Through his mind flitted the thought that here was no wraithlike creature who might prate only of harps and angels' wings. Nothing seemed too devilish or too human for Jane to understand.

"What has this crowd up here got against me?" he blurted, his hot, angry gaze on the girl's cool face.

"Honest, don't you know?" asked Jane, taking another piece of fudge.

"Of course I don't!" snapped Bruce. "If you do I'll appreciate a little information. I've always been rather

well liked, and suddenly to have every one—"

"I myself have never been popular," Jane sadly confessed, recklessly munching her fudge. "I've always gone about—"

"I know it," put in Bruce grimly. "Companionless, alone, misunderstood, and indifferent. You find others uncongenial. You are accustomed to the chill I am about to speak of, and that is why—"

"I am not!" said Jane, staring at him in amazement. "I know now! You've been talking to Sylvia Porter."

"But this is not telling me what I have done," Bruce suggested more calmly, having a hunch that this lovely little creature might give him a clew.

JANE smiled. It was a frank and charming smile, and Bruce noted that there were several little golden freckles on her nose.

"They think you are a thief," said Jane, dropping the words into the sweet silence like little pelted stones.

"*What?*"

Jane burst into laughter that had the sound of ice tinkling against fragile glass. It was elfish laughter, slightly bitter, for Jane was loving Arthur Bruce very hard just then. She would have loved him had he been a gardener or a coal heaver or a jockey.

"Yes," she said gently, "they think you took that emerald pendant that vanished at the Vansittart house party two years ago."

For a moment Bruce was speechless. Then he asked stiffly:

"Is this a joke?"

"Well, I think it is," mused Jane; "but then no one else ever thinks as I do. You can see that in little things like smoking and drinking and petting parties and moonlight bathing."

"Who started this wild tale?" demanded Bruce, his hands clenched.

"Sylvia Porter," replied Jane calmly.

"Miss Porter!" gasped Bruce. "Why—why should she—"

"If you ask me," said Jane, pursing her sweet lips and handing him the fudge plate, which he angrily refused, "I should say that she is crazy about you. Object, matrimony."

"Good Heavens!" choked Bruce incredulously.

"Good work!" nodded Jane. "She is a clever girl—much smarter, alas, than I am."

"Do you mean to say that Sylvia Porter deliberately set afloat the suspicion that I was the thief at the Vansittart house party—the man who stole that emerald pendant?" flared Bruce.

"Sure she did," smiled Jane. "No one else could do it so well. Isn't she too utterly lovely? You see, she is really an awful frump and downright unpopular, but would anybody call her that? Does anybody even *know* it? Gracious, no! She sees to that."

Arthur Bruce felt as if he had fallen into a sea of bewildering and unfathomable femininity, and it behooved him to watch his stroke.

"How could any one dare think I took that cursed pendant?" he demanded, his jaw set in a fashion that sent delighted thrills chasing along the nerves of the young woman on the rock.

"Oh, Sylvia doesn't assert anything," replied Jane. "She just sighs and whispers and looks, and now and then she smiles. She would take away your reputation if she could get your name. I knew she had marked you for hers the day you arrived."

Bruce, not entirely believing, was much perturbed. He recalled the rude

behavior of that fat Porter, the lovely Sylvia's father.

"But this is too ridiculous!" he cried.

"Sylvia is like a creeping poison," went on Jane, watching him miserably. "No one knows how she spreads. If she told her parents that you were a thief—only she would never put it so bluntly as that—they wouldn't leave you in the room with the spoons!"

"A fine lot of friends I have if this wild thing can be started by a girl, and—" Bruce began furiously, and stopped, words failing him. "Miss Daffney, this is too bad! What could Sylvia know about that house party on Long Island? She wasn't there, and neither were her parents."

"But she knew every one who was there," Jane gently pointed out. "I tell you, Sylvia wants to get you out in the open, alone, ostracized, furious, and fighting mad. Then she'll defend you and spring that delicious stuff about being the only one who believes in you; but it may be just a bit early for that yet."

Sylvia kept shrinking from him as he spoke

Bruce looked at the lovely Jane in a helpless rage. This might be her game as well as Sylvia's. Which girl was honest—this dark little beauty with her yellow gown, as corollaed as an Iceland poppy, as golden as the August fields, all fluted out about her on the

big flat rock, or the exquisite, soulful-eyed Sylvia?

"Of course you don't have to believe me," Jane went on sorrowfully, with devils of mischief dancing in her glorious eyes; "but you asked me. I'd like to spoil her cheap game, and I admit it."

"I suppose, after all, we have few friends," said Bruce bitterly.

Jane nodded.

"Yes; but you have one—Sylvia. Pretty soon she'll be the only one up here, except me. She isn't counting on me."

Bruce looked helplessly into the lovely little face above him. He felt that he must get away and think. and with a muttered apology he left her, carrying with him the picture of her on that rock."

DURING dinner he studied Sylvia Porter's pale, lovely face. Jane's story seemed distorted, impossible; but the more he thought of it the more he felt convinced of its truth. He was avoided. He was no longer popular. There was one thing to do—ask Tom Howton the truth; and that would look fine, dragging a girl into it—an angelic creature like Sylvia!

But was it certain that Sylvia was the guilty one? What about the other girl? Jane looked impish enough to try anything; and how could she eat her dinner after the awful amount of food she had consumed upon that rock?

Hang it! Bruce might leave the place; but that would be like running away. He would not go until he got at the truth of the matter and cleared himself.

After dinner he walked past the attractive figure of Ivy Waters and bowed before Sylvia, where she sat alone in dreamy thought, crushed into a huge blue chair that flung out the dawn-tinted chiffons of her filmy gown most exquisitely. One might wonder how Sylvia chanced to sit in just that chair; but Jane did not wonder. Sylvia always chose her furniture.

"There is a moon," said Bruce. "Will you take a little walk with me? I'm so unpopular that I fancy no one will dance with me if I stay in here."

Sylvia rose with a puzzled smile that did wonders to her delicate lips.

"I would adore taking a walk," she said; "but why be so foolish about dancing? You know you are always mobbed."

Jane, lounging in a big divan opposite, with two eager young men hanging over her, watched with narrowed eyes as Bruce and Sylvia Porter left the room. If Sylvia won him, she thought she would die. What would be the use of going on? Life would not be worth living.

Outside the moonlight lay like bars of silver on path and tree and flower. It turned the crags to precious metal and the falls to a silvery shower. Sylvia looked as if she should have been painted into some old world garden or upon some ancient balcony; yet, for some reason, no man ever strolled in the moonlight with her.

SHE stooped above a rose, sinking her curved lips into it, her eyes seeking those of Bruce.

"I used to believe that the perfume of flowers was the breath of some fairy that slept in them," she said softly. "I was a quaint, queer child, and I've never forgotten some of the delightful and impossible things I once believed."

Yes, that was it—fairies and moonlight and flowers, gamboling lambs and heavenly music—Sylvia's line. Ugh!

Bruce seemed to see a rock with a bewitching dark-haired elf perched upon it, eating fudge.

"I think that some one up here has been doing me harm," he said deliberately. "I can't get at the root of it. I spoke to you about it to-day, but I'm afraid you were not frank with me."

"Why, I was told before you came that you were one of the most popular men in society," returned Sylvia, with soft wonder; "and I know you are. Haven't I, who am so much alone, watched you and wished we might be friends, wondering what it must be like to go about the world as you do, drawing people to you, making them like you?"

"Oh, come now," said Bruce curtly, "don't tell me you can't see what I mean! Why, the girls won't even dance with me! Tom Howton practically admits that there is something, and that he has no patience with it."

"But I know nothing of it," protested Sylvia faintly. "I am not even of this party. If it were not for my parents I would never come to such affairs. These people have nothing to give me, any of them." As Bruce did not reply, Sylvia went on softly, almost tenderly: "I wish I could help you. If this thing is true, let me be your friend. I know nothing of it; but I do need friends—friends who understand. We must have something in common, or you would not turn to me."

It was annoying that just at that moment Arthur Bruce heard Jane Daffney's sweet, dreamy voice saying:

"She wants to get you out in the open, alone, ostracized, furious, and fighting mad. Then she'll defend you and spring that stuff about being the only one who believes in you."

Now, which girl was the creeping poison?

Sylvia said not a word about Jane. Bruce could not believe that she would harm any one; but, even so, Jane's words, like little pelted stones, tumbled about in his brain.

Well, Jane was no coward. She came right out in the open.

"Just give me a hint if you hear anything," he told Sylvia gently. "That's my idea of friendship."

"I will," she promised eagerly. "I never could understand people believing things without proof—just going with the tide."

Bruce looked into the sweet, innocent eyes lifted to his, and a surge of anger against that witch of a Jane swept him. Why couldn't he forget her?

"Will you give me this dance?" he asked Sylvia, and drew her hand within his arm.

For the first time since the Howton house party gathered in the cottage, Sylvia Porter waltzed with a man. Such waltzing as it was. The slender form in the dawn-tinted chiffons melted into Bruce's strong arms. Now and then she spoke softly and swept up her lashes to look into her partner's eyes. Had it not been the detached Sylvia, an onlooker might have said that she was flirting; and there was one spectator who knew that she was.

That one rose from the depths of a cushioned divan, went out on the porch in the moonlight, and kicked a footstool viciously. Kicking footstools was a sign of temper with Jane, and she had been kicking them ever since she was three years old; only now her dusky eyes were blinded with tears, and she beat down a sob in her throat.

BRUCE had decided that he would get Tom Howton and choke the truth out of him. Tom was the one to go to, not these girls.

Tom was in the sun parlor, mopping his brow.

"I'll have a word with you," said Bruce firmly. "You evaded me to-day, but I've run you to earth now. What has everybody up here got against me? You've got to tell me, Tom."

Howton sank down helplessly in a huge chair.

"It's a lot of tommy rot," he groaned. "I don't know where it started. Don't think Nancy and I put any credence in it; but somebody has got it circulating around that you took that emerald pendant at the Vansittart house party, and that on account of your dad's friendship with the Vansittarts they hushed it up. It seems you had a lot of big bridge debts. It's crazy rot, but there you are, old man. I've been trying to get at where it started, but a host can't do much."

"This must be killed, Tom," said Bruce, who had grown rather white. "Why would any one start a thing like that? Why, I had no more to do with that theft than any other guest who—"

Howton rose with a kind of roar. His face was red and angry.

"Don't insult me by saying that!" he snapped. "*You* stealing emerald pendants! Good Heavens! Now, see here—I've got only one idea, and it's entirely my own. Do you know that Rex Edmonds chap who was at the Vansittart house party?"

"Of course," said Bruce. "He was always talking about how many miles he could get to a gallon. Why?"

"He's Sylvia Porter's cousin," said Howton, and left his guest alone in the sun parlor.

That impish yellow figure on the big rock—had she told Bruce the truth, or had she herself started the rumor? Which girl was the schemer? Howton evidently believed it to be Sylvia. Rex Edmonds was her cousin. Well, that did look suspicious.

While Bruce stood there, feeling momentarily helpless, Howton again appeared in the lighted doorway.

"Art, will you come out here?" he asked. "The rottenest thing has happened. Mrs. Porter has lost her diamond pendant!"

"What?" Bruce strode forward and stared with horror into his host's eyes.

"Yes. If you've got it, bury it in a fern jar before you come in," said Howton hysterically. "Gosh, what will happen next? It looks as if somebody has it in for you, Art. The thief is using you to hide behind!"

As Bruce followed Howton into the living room, where every one had been dancing, wild ideas chased themselves through his head. Had Jane, carrying on her deeply clever scheme, taken that pendant? Had Sylvia done it herself, to involve him further? Had Mrs. Porter, desiring his name and his money for her daughter, aided the daughter in her dirty work? Or was the Vansittart thief, in some sort of disguise, using him, as Howton said?

A STRANGE silence fell as Bruce appeared. Mrs. Porter went on speaking in a high, shrill voice.

"I had it on until a short time ago," she wailed. "I had two dances, and several people bumped into me. Tom Howton, I insist upon a search! I don't intend to lose my pendant as that Vansittart pendant was lost!"

Bruce looked at the agitated lady impersonally. Was she capable of that?

"Mr. Bruce was present at that other house party," Porter suggested in a booming voice. "Perhaps he can give us a hint as to how to proceed."

"Oh, father!" cried Sylvia, her

tragic eyes begging forgiveness from Bruce.

"Well, I haven't your wife's pendant, if that's what you mean, Porter," said Bruce pleasantly. "Neither did I take the one at the Vansittart party, although I believe some one here has been giving the impression that I did. That person is probably the thief. A clever idea, using me and then springing his own game!"

"Jove, that would be clever, wouldn't it?" demanded one young man of no one in particular.

"I insist that Howton and Mr. Porter search me," said Bruce.

Jane Daffney, standing beside Ivy Waters, gave her arm a pinch.

"Isn't he splendid?" she asked. "Don't you wish you had believed in him? Because I kind of think you won't see much of him after this."

"Father," Sylvia was saying in pained tones, "please do not humiliate yourself and us by searching Mr. Bruce. Mother, perhaps you left the pendant in your room."

"My darling," returned Mrs. Porter fondly, "that is like your sweet, unsuspecting nature; but I know I had it on me. It's worth fifty thousand dollars."

"I must insist," Bruce was saying quietly, "upon being searched; but before we leave the room, gentlemen, it is only fair to make sure that no one else leaves it."

Several men took up positions near the doors.

"Nobody will get out, Art!" called one young man.

"You told me that your pendant had a good clasp," said Howton to Mrs. Porter. "If it had, how could any one get it off your neck without your knowledge?"

The Porters exchanged glances.

"The chain of the Vansittart emerald was cut," replied Mrs. Porter. "The chain was found on the floor, you will remember."

"It's no use, Tom," grinned Bruce. "They have it planted on me!"

"I wish to announce that I have no idea why this absurd thing should have been fastened upon Mr. Bruce," thundered Tom Howton. "Nobody ever before associated him with the Vansittart affair. Who started this, anyhow?"

Through the silence which followed this question Jane's sweet, clear voice came deliberately:

"Mrs. Porter, was your pendant heavily insured?"

"Jane, what a thing you ask!" cried Nancy Howton, horrified.

"Why is it?" asked Jane coolly. "Lots of people rob themselves, if the insurance is big enough. I thought perhaps they were using Mr. Bruce after building up this story about him. It was Sylvia who first mentioned the emerald theft to me, the day he came."

ARTHUR BRUCE looked at Jane for a moment, and the wild thought flashed into his mind that perhaps *she* had the pendant, for here she was coming out into the open to defend him, as she had said that Sylvia would do! With a shrug he turned to Howton, ignoring the furious Mrs. Porter, who seemed momentarily unable to get breath enough to reply to Jane.

"Come, Tom," he said. "Let's get it over."

"Not at all!" cried Porter. "This Daffney girl has said that my daughter started this yarn about the pendant, or revived it. I demand that she should explain what she means."

"Oh, please, father!" protested

Sylvia in deep pain. Her lovely, distressed face was turned full upon Bruce. "Mr. Bruce, do drop this silly thing. Jane just says that because we have never been friends. Don't mind her!"

This was noble of Sylvia, but it was what every one would have expected her to do. As for that impish, mysterious Jane—

"I think," said Mrs. Porter, looking weakly about, "that Sylvia should be kept out of this. She has never been subjected to—really, her poor nerves will never stand this shock. Go to your room, my darling child!"

"I could not," replied Sylvia, still in deep distress. "Mother and father, please drop this! The pendant is covered by insurance. Why make every one so miserable? Send for some detectives, if you like, and let them examine the servants. I am ashamed of you both!"

Heavy tears welled into the limpid blue of Sylvia's lovely eyes.

"Sylvia, you know perfectly well that after what Rex wrote you about the Vansittart house party I cannot have this clever young Bruce person walking off with my diamonds!"

"Just what did Mr. Edmonds write you, Miss Porter?" asked Bruce.

"Oh, it was nothing at all." Sylvia's lip quivered. "It was just gossip. Mother always makes so much of everything!"

Jane pinched Ivy's arm.

"Isn't she delicious?" she asked with a long breath.

"Art, you can thrash out this rubbish that Edmonds wrote, if you like," snapped Howton; "but I settle one thing now—neither you nor any guest of mine is going to be searched!"

"But you realize my position," said Bruce coldly. "I shall insist that—"

"Insist all you want," roared Howton. "None of my guests are thieves. I would go before the authorities and swear it. Nobody here has to steal diamonds!"

Then Jane again stepped forward, her yellow gown making a froth about her slender body, her beautiful little head held high.

"I propose that every one of us should submit to a search," she said clearly. "If Mr. Bruce does, we all should. I'll search the women, if one of them will search me. Like Mr. Bruce, I insist upon it!"

AS she spoke, her eyes met those of Bruce, and at a little graceful motion of her hand he started slightly and looked back at Sylvia. Then his eyes narrowed, and an ugly expression grew about his handsome lips.

"You mean well, Jane," said Howton sharply; "but I cannot have that sort of thing going on. If the pendant is not found within a few hours—then, perhaps."

"Be careful, Tom," warned Bruce, "or you'll be accused as my accomplice!"

"Mr. Bruce," cried Mrs. Porter hysterically, "are you going to refuse to let my husband search you? I think every one here should be searched. I would want to be, under these circumstances."

"Of course," said Bruce gravely. "I am begging him to search me, Mrs. Porter."

"Well, come on," growled Porter unwillingly.

"Yes, but you get out of my house while you do it!" roared Howton. "Not under my roof will Art Bruce be searched! Why, the boy has a bigger income than any one else here! Why

would he be stealing pendants? Tommy rot!"

"This is not fair," said Jane quietly. "If one is searched, we should all be searched."

A chorus of voices answered her, but Jane's motion was not approved. Tom and Nancy Howton stood firmly against it, the attitude of the Porters toward Bruce evidently influencing them.

"It is to be regretted," said Bruce sadly, when he returned to the living room with Porter, "that the pendant was not found upon my person. It is now evident that after the theft I found a hiding place for my loot in the sun parlor, for I have not been any farther than that since the loss was discovered."

Mrs. Porter began to weep hysterically.

"Oh, I can't lose my lovely pendant!" she sobbed.

Bruce crossed the room to Sylvia, who looked up at him with soft eyes of distress.

"Are you afraid to come for a little walk with me?" he asked gently. "There is something I wish to ask you."

"I was hoping you would take me away!" said Sylvia with pathetic desperation. "I want a chance to apologize!"

Sylvia's mother started forward as the couple passed her, and called out to her husband, but Nancy Howton laid her hand on Mrs. Porter's arm.

"Don't be an idiot!" she said sharply. "It is the ideal match for Sylvia."

In the moonlit gardens Bruce turned to the girl with his jaw set determinedly.

"You must tell me what was in the letter that your cousin wrote to you," he told her bluntly. "I've got to know. It is only fair."

"Mother makes mountains out of molehills," said Sylvia in anguish. "Please, it was nothing! So many times my parents have done this to me, crashing into some priceless friendship that might have been mine! I had hoped that they would keep out of this, that you and I in perfect congeniality might have—"

"*Where is that letter?*" demanded Bruce.

"I burned it," replied the girl faintly. "I did not want it around. I don't know why mother started that story. I—"

Bruce had again a fleeting vision of a yellow witch on a rock, of Jane's dusky, defiant eyes.

"Miss Porter," he said gravely, "there was nothing at all about me in your cousin's letter. That is why you burned it. You, and not your mother, spread this story about me. You set out to humiliate me. You fanned that affair to-night, and you have so played upon your parents that you worked them up to the shameful scene in which they disgraced themselves this evening. Your game doesn't work with me. Rex Edmonds never wrote you anything about that pendant and myself. We were good friends; but he is your cousin, and he was there, and you used him."

Sylvia kept shrinking from Bruce while he spoke, until she leaned back against a great bowlder, her delicate hands spread out at her sides on the rough rock, her lovely, shocked face uplifted to the determined young man who lashed her with his words. This delightful attitude, however, like that of a young Christian martyr of an ancient era, had no effect upon Bruce. He was thinking of Jane Daffney, and

of something that she had done inside there in the living room.

"How can—how can you?" murmured Sylvia pitifully.

THEN Arthur Bruce did a thing of which he was afterward vaguely ashamed, but which he would have done again if necessary. He took a step forward and closed a hand about one of Sylvia's beautiful bare arms. Then he drew her from the kindly support of the rock and stared with angry determination into her alarmed blue eyes.

"Sylvia Porter," he grated, "put your hand in your bosom and take out your mother's diamond pendant! I shall hold you here until you do, and, if you don't, I shall get it for you!"

A desperate cry died on the girl's parted lips.

"Get it!" said Bruce. "I saw your hand go to your breast every time Jane Daffney said that the women must be searched. Your hand and your eyes betrayed you. Nobody planted that pendant on you, because it couldn't have been put where it is without your knowledge. It was a pretty game, but it won't work!"

Even as he spoke, Bruce was thinking always of Jane. It was a strange world, for she did not in the least resemble the picture of the future Mrs. Bruce that he had always carried in his mind. She was far more wonderful.

"How dare you?" sobbed Sylvia, terrified.

"Get that pendant!" snapped Bruce. "You stole it from your mother when you had your stage set. I'll give you three minutes to get it!"

His watch in his hand, Bruce stood looking at the exquisite ethereal Sylvia where she had fallen back against the rock. This time she was not posing. She was a limp strip of pale chiffon.

"Two!" said Bruce, very businesslike.

One slender hand went to the crossed laces on Sylvia's bosom, but still it hesitated.

"Three!" said Bruce, and returned the watch to his pocket.

With a gasp Sylvia thrust her hand into her bosom and brought out in her fingers the glowing diamond pendant that had such a short time before hung upon her mother's scrawny neck.

"Come!" said Bruce.

Taking the girl's shrinking arm, he turned back to the house.

"What are you going to do?" cried Sylvia.

"Tell them the truth," he said curtly. "If you are as smart as I know you are, you'll keep mum about it. Only don't try this stunt with any of my friends. I might interfere!"

He felt sure that Sylvia would play the game, for he knew that she must have nerve. Any girl as clever as she was would not lack that. Under her misleading softness there was an armor of steel.

Every one was still in the living room when Bruce led his captive back there. He held the shimmering pendant aloft.

"The lost is found," he announced cheerfully. "Mrs. Porter, you owe me an apology. I will collect one from your husband, also. Miss Porter and myself just discovered your pendant."

All gathered about them, and everybody seemed to speak at once. Tom Howton grasped Bruce's arm.

"Where did you find it?" he asked.

"Caught in Miss Porter's gown," replied Bruce with a smile. "It was fast in the chiffon, and we had a great time getting it. Mrs. Porter, you can

see that your safe clasp must have somehow come undone, since the chain was not cut."

Bruce did not need to be told how the pendant had been removed by the clever daughter from her mother's neck. The devoted Sylvia was always fussing with her mother's hair or collar. It was one of the things she did well.

"I don't see how it could happen," Mrs. Porter was saying, her face crimson. "See, John, it seems to be all right."

"But it did happen, mother," said Sylvia sweetly. "In some way it had become fast in my gown, and Mr. Bruce discovered it. None of you would listen to me, but now you can see how wrong you were regarding him. Apologize at once!"

"Darling, if every one listened to you, this world would be heaven," sighed Mrs. Porter. "I do apologize to Mr. Bruce, and also to Tom and Nancy. I made a fool of myself; but you know, Sylvia, what Rex wrote you in that letter—"

"Mother, I told you that you imagined that!" protested Sylvia in pallid distress.

HOWTON touched Bruce's arm again.

"I don't quite get this," he muttered.

"You've got all of it you ever will get," said Bruce, looking his host steadily in the eyes.

As he spoke, however, he caught a glimmer of something yellow out on the sun porch, and for the second time that night Arthur Bruce did a rude thing. He practically bolted from the room. Even so, as he reached the sun parlor the little yellow thing was speeding down the moonlit path and around a corner of rock and out of sight.

Seated on a marble bench, her knees in her arms, her little pointed chin upon them, for all the world like a mischievous elf plotting devilment in the moonlight, he found her. Right then and there he tore up for good and all the picture of the future Mrs. Bruce and placed Jane's lovely face in the spot which that different countenance had always occupied in his mind.

"See here," he said, advancing upon her relentlessly, "have you ever been kissed by a man?"

"Gracious, no!" replied Jane, and scrambled to her feet in a great hurry.

"Well, that's what you came out here for," said Bruce with determination. "You are as clever as Sylvia in your way, but I love your way, Jane! I've learned about women from you, you delicious little imp!"

"But I played a game, too, to get you, Arthur Bruce!" admitted Jane, edging away from his inevitable arms. "I was just as scheming as Sylvia. I—"

"You were," said Bruce, catching the yellow gown, crisp little frills and all, in his arms, and cruelly crushing it; "but if it hadn't been for you making that motion with your hand, and telling me where Sylvia had hidden the pendant, I might even yet be in imminent danger of spending some months in the local jail! Yes, you have played a game with me, sweetheart—and now you are going to pay for it!"

"No man has ever kissed me!" protested Jane desperately, turning her face aside from his seeking lips, a demure dimple peeping out in her cheek.

"Well, you've missed a lot," said Bruce grimly, as he captured her sweet lips with his own; "for no other man is ever going to—now!"

She flew through the air, the thundering herd almost upon her

Hearts and Thrills

Jean never knew fear—until she looked into the eyes of love!

By Eric Howard

JEAN GODFREY leaned down from her horse and cupped her ear to the assistant director.

"Got it, Jean?" she heard him call. "All you have to do is ride and fall, see? You're caught in that stampede. The cattle are pounding after you. There's no escape. But when you hit that dry creek bed your horse stumbles and you shoot over his head. Make it good. We don't want a retake on any stunt stuff. You land in the sand. The cattle plunge over you. Then Jack rides in, cuts through the herd and seizes you in his arms, carrying you to safety. Got it?"

"Sure," answered Jean. "Let's go."

"Make it good, but don't take unnecessary chances. We don't want you hurt—we've got another big stunt coming up."

"Okay," she nodded. Then, above the noise and confusion of the herded cattle, she called out to the man who was to rescue her, "Hey, Jack! Ready?"

He rode over to her.

"When you hit that sand," he said soberly, "flatten out. They'll jump over you, most likely. Keep your head down. I'll be there as soon as I can make it. Don't pay any attention to me—just know I'm coming. I'll get you all right."

"No fear, Jack. I've been in stampedes before."

"All right, Sid," Jack called to the assistant director. "We're ready if you are. Hey, cowboys! Keep a lane cleared for me so I can get through. If the herd closes in and Jean's in danger, you fellows ride in and turn the cattle. Let's go!"

Jean smiled up at him. It was certainly good to have Jack to rely on in a stunt like this. With him riding to the rescue, she had nothing to fear. He could swing down from his horse, hanging by one stirruped toe, and lift her in his arms. All she had to do was to make the jump from the saddle; and that was easy. Her horse was trained to stumble at a signal, and when he did she'd sail through the air. She had done harder things than that many times.

The assistant had hurried back to the director and the chief camera man. The other members of the company were seated in a line of collapsible chairs, waiting for the stunt stuff to be shot.

Lenore Lane, the leading woman, was there. A maid was repairing her make-up. Richard Dare, the star, sat beside her, muffled up in a heavy sweater. Jean was doubling for Lenore, in the strenuous scenes, and Jack was doubling for Richard.

It was all in the day's work.

The director got on a tame old horse and rode to a marked line. He lifted his megaphone.

"All right, Miss Godfrey!" he called. "The cameras are ready. Now—" He began giving directions.

"Gosh!" thought Jean. "They must think I'm dumb. I guess they get that way directing Lenore. I've been told what to do six times already."

In response to his words she spurred her horse into the camera's range. The cowboys drove the herd forward in a very fair imitation of a stampede. Leaning low in the saddle, glancing backward with a fear-stricken expression, Jean rode swiftly while six cameras photographed the action. The director's high-pitched, excited voice reached her above the other noise.

Later a microphone would register the bellowing of the maddened cattle, for this picture was an all-talking, all-sound epic of the old West.

Out of the tail of her eye Jean saw Jack, ready to start for her.

"Now!" called the director through his megaphone. "Now! Your horse stumbles! You go over his head! You fall in the path of the stampede! Now!" he screamed. "Now!"

"Aw, shut up!" said Jean silently.

SHE signaled her horse with a sharp pull on the reins. He stumbled neatly, and at the same moment she half leaped, half flew from the saddle. For an instant she had the sensation of flying through infinite space. Then the sandy bottom of the dry creek bed rose to meet her. She landed neatly, with a minimum of jar.

"Perfect three-point landing!" she thought to herself. "Flatten out!"

She did just that, keeping her head down, while the cattle came closer and closer, the first of them plunging over her body, leaping from one bank to the other. But in another moment, as the herd was thicker, some of them would fail to make the leap, would crash down upon her— She refused to think of that possibility. You can't think of danger and be a good stunt girl.

"Come on, Jack!" she murmured. "Come on, big boy!"

She had scarcely uttered the words when his hands caught her shoulders

and she was lifted up before him on the saddle. His arms were around her, he was holding her easily, while his horse plunged on to safety.

"Good kid!" he said. "Great stuff! Open your eyes, we're out of it! Didn't strike you, did they?"

"Never touched me!" she laughed, looking up at him.

The director was still shouting. "You come to! You look up into his eyes. You fling your arms about him. Now!"

"This is the hard part," grinned Jean. "This is where Lenore shines."

But she did what the director required. She flung her arms around Jack, and he leaned down to kiss her lightly on the cheek.

"Good kid!" he murmured.

That scene, of course, would be made later with Lenore and Richard in a close-up. Lenore would do her misty-eyed, sappy stuff, and Richard Dare would look noble and heroic, and the audience would think them wonderful. She and Jack weren't close-up actors.

A moment later he slowed down and lifted her gently to the ground.

"Thanks for the rescue, old-timer." Jean waved her hand. "I'll do as much for you some day."

Jack gave her a slow grin. "Darn it, kid, I wish you'd cut out stunting. It's no job for a girl."

"How about yourself?" she laughed. "We got through that one, didn't we? Oh, we're tough, Jack—they can't kill us."

With another wave she walked over to where the company waited.

"Good work," said the director casually. "I guess that's all for today, Miss Godfrey."

"If you're sure, I'll go home," said Jean.

"Wait a few minutes, please. I can let you go after we've done these scenes with Mr. Dare and Miss Lane. Ready, Dick?"

"Yes," growled the star, yawning. "Let's get it over with."

Jean sat down in a vacant chair and glanced at the man beside her.

"Hullo," he said. "Cigarette?"

"No, I've got to keep my wind." She was still breathing hard.

"Gee, that was wonderful!" said the man.

She looked at him more closely. She had seen him around, on the set in the studio, and on this location at the company ranch, many times. They had nodded and exchanged a few words, but she didn't know just who he was or what he did. She saw, now, that he had a script open on his knees, and a pencil in his hand.

"Did you write this story?" she asked.

"No." He shook his head. "I'm the dialogue man, that's all. I just wrote the lines. My name's Grayson—Bob Grayson."

"Mine's Jean Godfrey."

"Yes, I know," he smiled. "We were introduced. I guess you don't remember."

He looked as if he might have a sense of humor. "I meet so many people!" yawned Jean, in an artful imitation of Miss Lenore Lane.

He chuckled and his eyes twinkled.

"Weren't you afraid to tackle that stunt?"

"Sure," she said simply. "You're always afraid, of course. But you just don't think about it. If you do you're lost. I think about other things—you know, a new dress or a good dinner or something."

He chuckled again. "Just the same, you shouldn't do it. The chances are

all against you. You may get by a hundred times, but the hundred and first—"

"That's what the insurance people say. They won't insure me."

"You see? That's just it. The chances are all against you. You shouldn't do it."

"Have to," said Jean. "Money. Ever hear of money?"

"Now that you mention it, I seem to have heard the word. But there are other, easier ways—" He looked up and pointed to Lenore and Richard, embracing in a close-up. "Like that," he suggested.

"I can't act. I'm just a stunt girl."

"Confidentially," he whispered, "she can't act either."

"We seem to agree on things," Jean twinkled at him.

"On everything except your vocation," he said, more soberly. "There ought to be a law against it. Why let a girl do stunts like that? Why don't they use a man?"

"They used to," Jean explained, "but it's hard to find a young man who's slender enough to look the part, even in a long shot. So we girls got our chance."

THE director, who had finished the scenes with Lenore and Dick, caught sight of her as he returned to his chair.

"Oh, that's all, Miss—" he said vaguely. He had already forgotten her name. "You may go, now. To-morrow we want—"

"Thanks. I know," she nodded. "I'll be ready."

Bob Grayson got up with her. She murmured a farewell to him and started toward the studio bus, a gallant, slender girl with a smile for every one she met.

Grayson followed, tucking his script into his pocket.

"Miss Godfrey," he called, "can't I drive you home? My car's right here, and I don't have to stay either."

"Why, yes," asserted Jean.

As she got into his roadster—a new, glittering thing with a long nose—Jack Harris rode up and doffed his huge sombrero.

"You want to practice to-morrow's stunt, kid, before we do it?" he suggested. "Maybe we'd better."

"That might be a good idea," Jean smiled. "But the hard work's up to you, and I'm banking on you, Jack."

"You get out here early," Jack suggested, "and we'll run through it once or twice."

"Okay!" agreed Jean. "Do you know Mr. Grayson, Jack? He's the dialogue man."

"Howdy!" said Jack. "All right, kid. See you *manana*."

Jean nodded, and Grayson stepped on the starter. The girl had slipped on a long coat to cover her costume, and had pulled a soft felt hat down over her eyes. She wore very little make-up, since she never appeared in close-ups.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Home, James!" she laughed. "Right into Hollywood, and around the corner from Sunset Boulevard. I'll tell you when we get to the street."

"What's the stunt you're going to do to-morrow?"

"Oh, just another little thrill for the fans. Jack and I—we're supposed to be Lenore and Dick, of course—are ambushed by Indians. Jack fights 'em off. We're on the edge of a cliff. There's no hope. He gestures to me to plunge over the cliff. I—like a goof—do just that. But instead of going all the way, I cling to a ledge

part way down. Jack sees me. I'm terrified. Lenore will do the terror stuff, of course."

"Yes, in perfect safety," commented Grayson.

Jean nodded. "I'm afraid to take the jump. So Jack ropes me—that's the hard part—and pulls me up again. But the Injuns are charging. We're sunk! There's only one chance — to leap together. I forgot to tell you—there's a lake down below—far, far below. We dive into that and Jack carries me to shore. Then — of course — they throw in a love scene. But we are not yet safe. More Injuns!"

"What!"

"It's not so hard—all depends on the way I take the first fall to that narrow ledge. The dive is easy."

"Gosh, what a girl!" murmured Grayson, inaudibly. Aloud he said: "For the love of movies, why do you do such things?"

"A lady must live. I got seventy-five dollars for to-day's performance, and I'll get a hundred for to-morrow's. That's a good week's wages. And with Jack on the job—he's the best stunt man in the game, on land, sea, or in the air—I'm playing safe."

"And when you're through with this picture, there'll be other stunts?"

"I hope so!" she declared. "Maybe some air stuff. That's not any harder than working with a horse, but I like horses. Do you?"

"You bet," agreed Grayson. But he was frowning, and he continued to frown a good part of the way into Hollywood from the location ranch. At last Jean indicated her street, and he swung off the boulevard, to stop before a small bungalow placed neatly between two large pepper trees.

"Here's home!" said Jean. "Want to come in? I can give you a glass of orange juice or something."

"Delighted," he smiled.

"Oh—" she stopped him. "Don't mention the stunts, please. Mother doesn't know I do that kind of thing."

He nodded, puzzled, and followed her into the living room. At a large window, in a wheel chair, sat a pleasant-faced, mature woman.

"Hello, mumsy!" cried Jean, embracing her. "This is Mr. Grayson, the eminent dialogue writer."

Mrs. Godfrey offered him her hand, and he bowed over it. She was very pleasant and cordial, with the cheerfulness one sometimes encounters in invalids. He discovered, with a shock, that she was partially paralyzed.

"Excuse me a minute," said Jean, dashing into a bedroom to remove her camera make-up and to change into a frock.

Grayson sat down and talked with her mother. It was apparent, almost at once, that she knew little about Jean's work. She didn't go to pictures any more. Grayson warily avoided any mention of the stunts.

Radiant and lovely, Jean emerged at length in a blue frock the exact shade of her eyes.

"I made a cake, Jean," said her mother. "Perhaps—"

"She's the most wonderful person!" cried Jean. "Makes cakes an' everything! Wait till you taste it."

She dashed into the kitchen, followed by her mother's laughter and by Grayson's admiring eyes. What a girl!

THEY met often after that, Grayson and Jean. He watched her, breathless with fear, as she went through the stunt the next day. With a little twinge that surprised him he

saw the redoubtable Jack Harris lift her in his arms and hold her for a too-long moment.

Later she laughingly consented to have lunch with him.

"Only I eat an awful lot," she told him. "That's one good thing about my job—the exercise keeps me thin, and I don't have to diet."

He was always on hand when she was ready to leave, with his car waiting. He drove her home every afternoon, and often remained for a chat with her mother and a piece of delectable cake.

"Money!" she repeated, smiling, when again he asked her why she performed stunts. "I've got to get money. For mother, you know. There's a chance—well, she might be cured, with the right sort of treatment. Mother's so game, Bob; so awfully game."

"You, too," he murmured. "But, Jean, if your mother knew how you earned your money she wouldn't let you. It isn't fair to her."

"I've thought of that," she nodded. "But you see I don't really take such terrible chances. When I work with Jack, or some other good stunt man, I'm safe enough. I'm really awfully agile and quick. I could get out of 'most any danger—just like that!"

She snapped her fingers, with the confidence of strong healthy youth.

"Jean, I—" he began. Then said rather lamely, "I wish you wouldn't."

"You're as bad as Jack," she laughed. "It's all right for him to do stunts, but a girl's place is in the kitchen!"

"He's right," muttered Bob. "If not in the kitchen, at least in some place of comparative safety."

Jack's name occurred frequently in her conversation. They had worked together for a long time. Grayson

wondered how well she liked the stunt man—whether she loved him.

He hadn't become well acquainted with Jack, for the latter was a taciturn individual who held himself aloof from the others on the set. He had been a cowboy and a soldier of fortune. Now he was a stunt man. Handsome in a rough-hewn fashion, with quiet courage and a flash of audacity in his eyes, Jack was an attractive and interesting person. He seemed rather scornful of the mimic world in which he was now working.

Then, one night, after dinner at a beach café, Bob and Jean drove up the coast above Santa Monica. It was a clear, moonlight night, just cool enough to be pleasant. The girl mentioned an air stunt she was to do the next day, and Bob frowned. In response to his questions, she explained just what she would have to do.

It involved a parachute jump, and when she came to the most thrilling part of it, Bob suddenly swerved the car off the highway and parked it.

"Jean," he said, "please don't do it! I can't—I can't bear to have you do things like that."

"Don't be silly, Bob!" she laughed. "Why, I've done worse than that. I'll get by all right."

He put his hands on her shoulders, looked into her eyes, and then suddenly bent down and kissed her. His arms slipped around her body, he held her close to him and kissed her again and again.

Between kisses he murmured, "Jean, dear, I love you! I can't let you do such things. Please give up all these foolhardy stunts and marry me!"

She thrust him away from her.

Oh! Would Jack never catch him?

"Bob, please—no, don't kiss me again! I— You took me by surprise. For a dialogue man," she laughed shakily, "you're a regular John Gilbert. But it can't be, Bob. I like you—lots, but I can't marry you."

"You love me, Jean, you know you do!"

She shook her head sadly. "No, I don't know that. I—like you. But love—I don't know, Bob. Anyway, I can't marry — anybody — for a long, long time. There's mother—"

"What has that to do with it? I'm fond of your mother, and I think she likes me. Marry me, Jean! Give me the right to protect you, to help your mother. I can do it. Why, I make much more than you do, just writing silly lines. It isn't right for you to take such chances when I—"

"Please!" she stopped him. "You'll make me nervous if you talk that way. You don't understand, Bob. I've got to take care of mother myself. I couldn't let you, or any one, help me with that. It's my job."

"But, Jean! If we were married it would be my right—"

She shook her head again, and laid her hand on his. "That's fine of you, Bob, but it can't be."

"Do you care—for anybody else?" he asked, after a pause.

Jean looked thoughtful.

"Not that way," she answered him. "Jack—I think Jack loves me, but he's never said so. I like him, too, but I don't think I love him."

Her eyes were deep and candid as they met his.

"Oh, Jean, you're such a wonderful child!" he murmured. "If you'd only—don't you love me a little bit?"

She laughed lightly at his serious mien.

"A whole lot," she said, kissing his cheek gently. "Now let's go back. I've got to get lots of sleep before to-morrow. Must be fit, you know."

BUT when she reported for the airplane stunt the next day she discovered that it had been postponed. She had been called by the company for several days' work, at her usual pay, but now the director informed her that although she must remain on call, they might not shoot her scenes for several weeks. In consequence she had a great deal of free time while on the set. Bob Grayson had been assigned to this company, and was now writing the lines for the super-air drama. As usual, he had little to do except when they were producing dialogue.

"Going to marry me to-day?" he asked each morning, smiling at Jean.

"Not to-day, mister, not to-day," she replied.

"At the rate this director's working, you'll be ready for the old ladies' home before they get around to your scenes. Better marry me while you wait."

She shook her head. "Anyway, they're paying me."

"If I didn't know you so well, I'd think you were mercenary."

"I am! You should see me looking at my bank book—with a miserly light in my eye!"

"I'm glad these stunts are postponed. I'd be a nervous wreck if I had to watch you."

She gave him her hand with a smile. "You're nice, Bob. You can drive me home and I'll give you a real dinner, just for that."

He hadn't kissed her again since that night on the coast, but he never saw her without wanting to take her in his arms.

Jack Harris appeared on the set one morning, ready for work. "Hello, kid," he greeted Jean. "What's the action?"

"I don't know," she said. "I've been waiting for two weeks and haven't worked yet."

"I guess we'll work to-day, then," observed Jack, rolling one of his brown-paper cigarettes. "They sent me a hurry call. I guess they won't want anything very hard—just ask us to crash a couple of ships together, set them afire and drop out, eh? Something simple like that."

But when the assistant director called Jack, and Jean also rose, he said, "We aren't using you yet, Miss Godfrey. Later."

"How much later?" asked Jean.

"Er—I don't know," said the assistant director. "Er—later."

"You must like to pay me for sitting here," laughed Jean. "I haven't done a thing for two weeks."

"That's all right. We'll use you—later."

Jack grinned. "Take it easy. When they want you they'll want something difficult. Well, here goes. What's the action, brother?"

Jean watched them, puzzled. A man younger than Jack appeared beside him. The other was about her own build and weight, and he was wearing a girl's flying clothes.

The assistant director explained the action, and both stunt men nodded. Then they walked off toward two planes. On the field beyond was the camera plane, already warming up.

"What's the idea?" Jean demanded of the company manager. "It looks to me as if you're using that boy for my stunt."

"Oh, that's all right, Miss Godfrey. We won't need you this morning. You needn't wait."

"But why and how come?" insisted Jean. "Why pay me and then hire him?"

"Er—I don't know, exactly," the man stammered. "But you needn't wait. We'll use you—later."

He walked away, and Jean stood, with her head a little on one side, thinking hard.

SUDDENLY she turned and looked for Bob Grayson. He was sitting at a little desk, alone, scribbling on the margin of the script.

She walked over and stood before him.

"I'd like to ask you something," she began directly.

"Awfully busy," he murmured. "How about lunch?"

"I want to ask this now," Jean insisted. "What's the idea, Bob? Why am I being paid for sitting around this set? Why have they hired a boy to do the stunt I was supposed to do?"

Bob looked up, the guilty flush of the amateur conspirator on his face. "I don't know, Jean. I guess it's just another of those things. You know, this director is a funny duck, and—"

"Don't kid me, Bob! What is the idea? And what did you have to do with it?"

Bob stood up and faced her. "Well, if you've got to know," he said stubbornly, "I arranged it. I had to find some way of keeping you out of danger, and this is the best I could manage."

"You—you arranged it? Bob! You're paying my salary while I sit around here and look pleasant? How could you—how dare you?"

"What's the difference?" he demanded. "You're getting paid, aren't you? The company's paying you. It's none of your business whether they use you or not."

"Oh, Bob, that's the meanest trick anybody ever pulled! I—I hate you for it!"

"Jean!"

But Jean had already fled toward the planes. If there was still time she was going to do her own stunt, earn her own money. How dared he do a thing like that? How could he?

Bob ran after her, and caught her as she neared the planes. He caught her in his arms and held her.

"You're not going up!" he said. "You're not going up! I won't let you!"

"You let me go!" she cried, beating her fists against him. She called to the director, who failed to hear her above the roar of the motors.

She called to Jack, who had turned toward her, and he came up to them.

"Jack, make him let me go!" she cried, tears in her eyes. "He tricked me! This is my stunt—the thing I'm getting paid for—and I'm going to do it!"

"You stay out of this!" said Bob to Harris.

Jack laughed. "Hang on to her, old man!" he chuckled. "Never mind, Jean, there'll be other stunts. We're all set for this, and it's a mean one. I'm darned glad you're not in it."

"Jack, make him let me go!"

"Not me!" Jack refused. "I'm mighty glad you've got somebody to hold you back. So long! I'm going up."

"Jack!"

But Jack grinned and shook his head, walking away. Bob held her firmly. A moment later the planes took off, soaring above the field, rising steadily to an altitude permitting stunts.

"I hate you!" sobbed Jean, when at last Bob released her.

"I don't care," he said recklessly. "I did it to keep you out of this. I'd do it again and again. I'd do anything to keep you out of danger. And this is dangerous."

"Do you think I can take your money and do nothing?" she cried, weeping. "You—"

"Jean, please—" he began in protest, but Jean fled.

FROM a distance, choking back her sobs, she watched the action in the air. High above her the planes soared. The stunt was difficult and dangerous, although she was reluctant to admit it. It was all a matter of timing, as she saw it. She and Jack would have been able to do it together. It required that two persons—supposedly the story's hero and heroine—leap together from a disabled plane. Both had parachutes, but the girl's was supposed not to open. Some land-minded scenario writer had thought of that!

Dropping side by side, like two pellets, photographed meanwhile by the camera men in the other plane, the man saw the girl's danger, her terror, her helplessness. As his own parachute opened, he reached for her, barely caught her, and held her in his arms. Then, his parachute functioning well, although it had not been made for such a strain, they fell safely to earth. That was the stunt.

Of course, if anything went wrong, if he shouldn't catch her, she could open her 'chute. But—there was the alarming danger that she might be too far down to do that.

Now that slender lad was taking Jean's place. Probably some hungry kid who would do anything for a few dollars. Probably he had no experience or training. If he lost his nerve—

Jean shuddered as she would not have done had she herself been doing the stunt.

Now the two figures stood upright. Now they were leaping from the plane. Good start! Close together, side by side, within reach. No real flyers would leap in that way, but what did a scenario writer care for reality?

Down they came!

"Now! Now, Jack!" cried Jean.

She saw him, at that distance, reach for the boy. He caught him, lost him, caught him again. This would thrill even a camera man! But Jack was holding the boy, as he had often held her, while they floated down, more slowly now, beneath his open 'chute.

"Oh, good!" she cried. "Good!"

But as they came lower she saw that the lad was fighting Jack, like a fear-crazed, rescued swimmer. She would never have done that. She would have rested lightly in his arms, relying on him. Down they came, the boy struggling furiously, madly, while Jack tried to control him.

At last they landed, far out in the field. Jean, with many others, ran toward them.

When she got there several men were lifting Jack from the parachute. He was hurt. The stunt boy sat on the ground and sobbed.

Jean ran to Jack's side.

"Just a busted leg," he said. "That's all, kid. The boy lost his nerve. And I don't blame him."

Jean ran along beside them as they carried Jack across the field.

"If you'd let me go, Jack—"

"I'm glad I didn't. That's the hardest stunt I ever pulled. I darn near missed him—that's why he went crazy. If I'd missed the second time he wouldn't have had a chance to open up. No, I'm glad you were on the ground."

He smiled up at her, then winced as pain shot through his body.

He was placed in a big car, supported by many cushions, and rushed to the nearest hospital. Jean went along. Bob watched them from a little distance, frowning.

HOURS later, after his leg was set and he was comfortable, Jack was permitted to talk to Jean. She sat down beside his bed.

"I'm through stunting, kid," he told her. "To-day finishes it. I know when I've had enough. A hunch, see? I never knew what it meant to feel shaky until I almost missed that boy — and saw how scared he was. Lenore will have to go some to look that scared! Well, if that could shake me, something else will. And then—bingo! So I'm through."

He propped himself up on his pillows, reached for a cigarette and looked at Jean.

"And so are you," he continued. "You've got to quit, Jean. It's no job for a girl like you. Why, you've got everything—looks, brains, charm. You can't take risks like this. If it's time for me to quit, it's time for you, too. What do you say we quit together?"

Jean stared at him. She hadn't realized before how badly frightened she had been by Jack's injury. Of course, it was nothing—a broken leg, caused by an awkward fall while the fear-crazed lad fought him. But—

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"I mean, let's quit! I've got a little ranch in New Mexico, and a little money. Let's you and I—and your mother—go out there. I'm asking you to marry me, Jean."

"Oh, Jack!" Her face was burning, and her eyes glowed. "Oh, Jack, I couldn't! I—"

He took her hand, looked into her eyes. "So that's the way of it, kid? I was afraid so." He nodded. "Well, he's a fine chap. He'll make you happy. I'm sorry—I'm too late. I've always loved you."

"Who? What?"

"You love Grayson, of course," nodded Jack.

"I hate him!" cried Jean. "I—"

"Then marry me," repeated Jack, with a whimsical light in his eyes.

"Oh, I can't! I like you—you're like a big brother, Jack—I— But I can't marry you."

Suddenly, then, she put her head down on her arms and began to sob. Jack gently patted her hair.

"You don't hate him at all," he said softly. "You love him. I know, kid. Here!"

Lifting her head, he kissed her on the brow.

"Better go home," he suggested. "Your mother will be worried. Only remember—no more stunts! My hunch concerns you, too. And if I see you trying any, I'll do worse than Grayson did!"

Jean went home and stayed at home. No calls came from the studio, nor from Bob. She expected him to telephone, and had rehearsed what she

would say to him a score of times, but he didn't. To her mother's mild questions she was curt, and her mother smiled.

LATE in the afternoon of the third day of waiting, she telephoned Bob. While she was waiting for the connection, she almost hung up. She was trembling, and her eyes were bright.

At last she heard his voice.

"Mother wonders why you haven't been around," she said.

"I— Well— I'll be right over!" he announced.

She was sitting on the porch when he came. She rose to meet him.

"I—I thought," he stammered, "you didn't want to see me. I thought—Jack—you and Jack—"

"How could you think that," she asked, "when it's you?"

He caught her in his arms. "Jean, Jean! Oh, darling!"

He kissed her again and again, then suddenly held her away and looked at her.

"And no more stunts?" he demanded.

"No more stunts," she replied. "You won't let me, and Jack won't let me. Anyway, if Jack could lose his nerve, even for a moment, I might, too. And then— Well, as long as I was just myself, I could take chances; but now that I'm yours—"

"Will you marry me to-day?" he asked as he had asked often before.

And, with her heart in her eyes, Jean nodded as she raised her lips to his.

Love

I HAD counted love the music
Of your voice, the magic touch
Of your hand, and the caresses
Of the lips I prized so much.

But to-day, when you have left me,
I am wiser and I know;
Love was what your soul felt for me
And my own soul could bestow!

—*L. Mitchell Thornton*

"We're engaged and will be married very soon," she said, and hung up the receiver before Rhoda could answer

The Loyal Heart

Will Louise's great love carry her and Trevor over the bitterest barrier of all?

By Ruby M. Ayres

LOUISE'S engagement to Trevor Bruce came to an abrupt end when Trevor himself broke it after his fiancée found him alone in his apartment with another woman — Mercia Swindon, bride of Louise's father's oldest friend. Louise's great love still fought for him, trying to find some explanation of his conduct, and to her family she cried: "He gave *me* up, not I him! I'll never give him up—all my life!"

Agatha, her aunt, took her to Italy. While there the news of Mr. Swindon's divorce came to them—he had named Trevor Bruce corespondent!

But upon her return to New York Louise again meets Trevor accidentally, and a few nights later she distinctly hears him call, "Little Louise!" as

she sits alone in her bedroom. Instantly she answers the call, going hurriedly to his apartment. He *had* called her; she is just in time to see him conceal a weapon in his pocket. They are reconciled, planning to go away as soon as they are married.

And the next morning, as Louise lies dreaming happily in bed, news is brought to her that Mercia Swindon has been murdered! Trevor was the last person to see her alive.

CHAPTER XV

"YOU'RE very brave, Louise," her aunt told her. "I wish I had had your courage years ago."

"What do you mean? Don't you believe I was with him?" Louise laughed victoriously. "Well, I can soon prove it."

"But, my dear, when your father and I went out you were still here, and when we came home you were in your room. I tried the door and it was locked."

"I know. I locked it when I went out, and took the key. I came home early this morning—we had a taxi." She scanned her aunt's face eagerly. "Surely you believe me?"

"Of course—only... Oh, Louise, if only Trevor had never come into your life! He's brought you nothing but trouble."

"And the only happiness I have ever known," Louise added quietly. "Agatha dear, don't look so grave. Everything will be all right, I know it will." But though she spoke so bravely there was a nameless dread in her heart; supposing Agatha was not the only one who found it difficult to believe her story?

Well, there was the taxi driver—he could prove that what she said was true, and yet there would still be the horrible publicity—

Later on, when the house was quiet, she crept downstairs and found the evening paper. There it was—the account of poor Mercia's death—the flaring headlines, and a photograph of the dead girl.

Louise read the account without flinching. Mercia had been found dead in her bedroom at the small hotel where she had been staying. No revolver had been found, and none of the hotel staff had known of any visitor calling to see her—at the moment the whole thing was a mystery.

There followed a long account of Mercia's life—her marriage to Lionel Swindon, her divorce, and a great deal about Trevor.

"But only all the little mistakes he's made," Louise thought with an aching heart. "Nothing about his war service—they've just raked up everything they can against him."

She herself was not mentioned, though there was an allusion to his engagement a year before to "a young and very charming girl."

"To-morrow I shall tell every one that we are still engaged," Louise decided. She crept back upstairs, and as she reached the top, ran into her father. The pater was coming out of the bathroom clad in a bright red dressing gown, and with a large sponge in his hand. He stood still when he saw his daughter, and they looked at one another silently. Then he began in his blustering way:

"Lord above, I thought you had gone to bed hours ago."

"I did go," Louise said, "but I went down again to get something." She turned to go to her room, but he stopped her.

"Come here," he said fiercely, though his eyes were kind. Louise went to him, and he put an arm clumsily round her and kissed her.

"The bark's worse than the bite, my dear. Sorry if I was too rough." He kissed her again. "You get more like your mother every day," he added, and went off to his own room, shutting the door with a terrific slam just to let the household know he was still in a mighty rage.

LOUISE had expected a letter from Trevor by the morning mail, but there was none, though soon after breakfast Rhoda rang up.

"That you, Louise? Well, what about Trevor now?"

Louise felt her face flaming.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing." Rhoda's bored laugh came over the telephone. "Only that you're lucky not to be hitched up to him still."

"That's where you're wrong," Louise told her calmly, though her pulses were racing angrily. "We're engaged again, and we're going to be married as soon as it can be arranged."

She hung up the receiver quickly so she could not hear her friend's amazed reply, and turned away, trying to dismiss the incident from her mind. How hateful people were—always willing to kick the one who was down. Not that Trevor was down—not that anything could happen to him, but nevertheless it hurt her cruelly to feel that his name was already being bandied about so uncharitably.

Rhoda had only said what no doubt every one else was saying; she was the only one in the world who loved him and believed in him.

About an hour later Trevor came; he walked into the room just as he had done that morning when he came to break their engagement, and shut the door behind him.

"Well," he said with his whimsical smile, just as he had said then. "We get out of the frying pan into the fire, little Louise, or at least I do."

Louise went to him and put her arms round his neck, pressing herself close to him as he kissed her, feeling as she had felt two nights before when she went to his rooms—that she was the stronger, she was the one who must love and protect.

"It makes no difference," she whispered to him. "Nothing makes any difference."

He laughed at that, kissing her again before he put her gently from him.

"I couldn't come yesterday—the police were too interested in my movements." He looked at her searchingly. "You know what they are suggesting?"

"Yes." She managed a laugh. "It's so absurd. Besides—we've got an alibi. Of course you told them that I was with you all night?"

"Of course I did not. I'm not going to let them drag you into this."

"But you must—you must! I'll tell them if you don't. It will explain everything."

He shook his head. "Don't be too sure. They've found a letter..." He broke off with a gesture of distaste. "It's horrible—I wish to God I'd never—"

Louise said quickly, "You're not to say that, spoiling my happiness. Just when we're starting all over again. I'll come with you and we'll tell the police I was with you."

He looked at her ruefully.

"My dear, they'll say it's only natural you should perjure yourself for my

sake. They'll want stronger proof than just your word."

"There's the taxi driver—"

"I know, but..." He paced away from her and came back. "Look here, my dear. It's not too late now for you to save yourself. Think what it means—even if it's all right—people will say—"

"Do you think I care?"

"I know you don't, but I do. I'm not such a blackguard as to find any pleasure in dragging your name through all this...mud." He took her hand. "Can't you be a wise little girl and kick me out?" he submitted with a smile.

Louise stood staring at him, her face white, her eyes pathetic.

"Do you—do you want me to?"

FOR an instant she thought he was going to say yes, then suddenly he caught her to him, holding her fast, his cheek against her hair. And so they stood for a long time, silently, till Louise turned her head and kissed him.

"That's settled, then," she said with a sigh. She stood up, facing him with eyes that were bright again, and flushed cheeks.

"Even *you* couldn't throw me over a second time," she teased him. "Besides, I've told every one—Agatha, and Rhoda Neilson, and father—"

Trevor whistled. "Whew! What did he say?"

"Exactly what I knew he would say."

"Louise—" Trevor hesitated, "I hate to tell you, but the police have found letters of mine—"

"To Mercia?" Louise asked without flinching.

"Yes... None of them matter except a note I sent her three nights ago. She'd been worrying me...no, I don't mean that—but she wanted me to go round and see her." He avoided looking at Louise. "I hadn't you to consider then, and nothing seemed to matter much, so I said I'd go—wrote her a note and said I would go last night—be there about eight, I think I said.

"When the time came I didn't go—I was sick of it all. She seemed to guess I wasn't coming, and she came round to me instead. There was a scene—" He moved away from her, shaking his shoulders as if to rid himself of some unpleasant memory. "She'd only just gone when you came. That was the last time I ever saw her." He laughed mirthlessly. "The police don't believe me, and except for you and the taxi man, I haven't any one to prove what I say—"

Louise laughed excitedly. "You have. Don't you remember? Just as we were leaving your place the man we met at the door? You said he lived below you!"

Trevor gave a sudden shout. "My God, I'd forgotten. Old Hedley..."

They looked at one another silently, then suddenly Louise began to cry. She knew now how great her dread had been, and the relief was more than she could bear.

Trevor drew her to him, pressing her head against his shoulder.

"Don't cry, little Louise." His own voice was a little unsteady. "It's all right—we're going to start again. I'm going to be such a little saint in future you won't know me—" He was trying to make her laugh. "We'll forget all this—we'll go away together. I'll do my best to make up to you for what's gone...I swear, Louise. Oh, my dear, don't cry so."

Louise dabbed at her eyes.

"I'll be all right in a moment, it's only...I'm so happy."

He laughed ruefully.

"You've got a funny little way of showing your happiness," he chaffed her gently. "Look at me and smile—"

But though Louise looked up there was no smile in her eyes, only shadows of a fear that would not be dispelled.

"If only we could go away now... to-day...can't we, Trevor? I'm so afraid that something will happen after all—something dreadful."

"My dear, what can happen?"

"I don't know, but at the back of my mind...oh, can't we go to-night? Before it's too late..."

He took her hands in his, holding them firmly.

"Won't it look rather like running away?" he asked.

There was a long silence and Louise's sobbing grew quieter.

Presently she said, "I'm sorry. It's so silly. Don't be angry with me."

"I'm not angry with you, only with myself. I seem to have done my damnedest to spoil your life. Even now I shall be cutting you off from all your people—your friends. It isn't worth it, Louise. Some day you will realize it."

She answered him with passionate words; he was more to her than any one else—she did not mind what they had to face as long as they were together.

"You're so young," he said pitifully.

Then presently he left her.

"You won't worry if you don't hear from me, perhaps for a day or two?"

She shook her head.

"I'll come and see your father as soon as all this wretched business is straightened out."

"Yes."

He took her face between his hands.

"And you trust me now, little Louise?"

"Oh, Trevor, you know I do!"

AND then he went away, and Louise was left to ask herself why she was not perfectly happy—why even now she could not quite dispel the shadow of doubt from her mind.

It was foolish, unworthy; it must be because she was overtired, overstrung; she felt she would have given a great deal had it been possible to go to sleep and not wake up again until they were safely through all this troublesome time.

How little she had dreamed of all this that night when Trevor had stopped the car at the side of the Drive and said, "You wouldn't care to marry me, I suppose?"

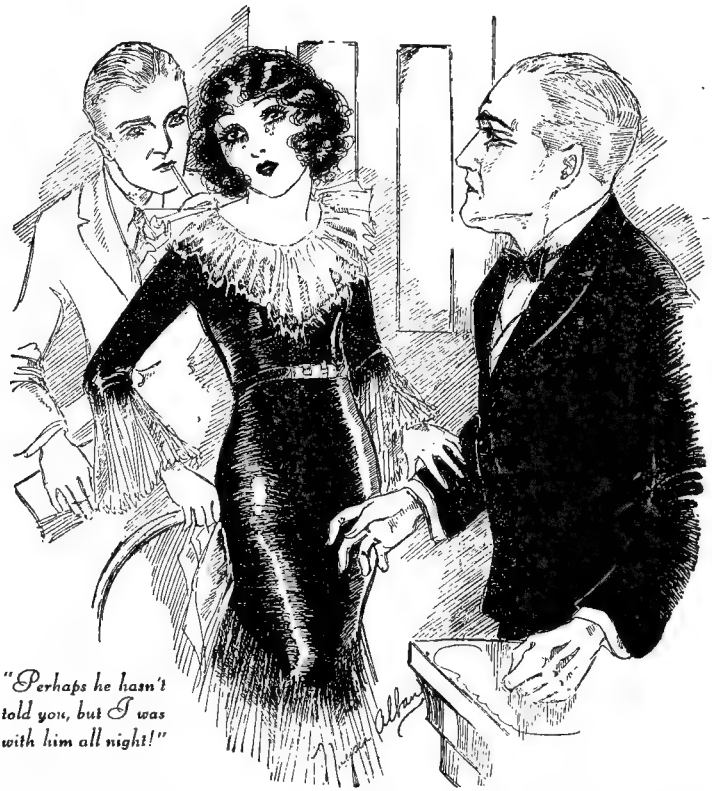
She had thought that moment was to be the beginning of a happiness that would last forever, and instead it had been the first step into a maze of trouble and disillusionment and heartache.

And yet she would not have had it different, and some day, soon, he and she would be looking back on it all and thinking how well worth while it had been to win through.

Louise loved Trevor because she could not help it, because she could not change; she loved him against all the world, and it would have been useless for all the world to have come to her and said that he was the biggest scoundrel unhung; she would either have said it was a lie, or that she loved him and did not care, for a woman's ideals are, after all, set by her own requirements rather than by any standard of excellence. She did not desire so much that a man be good or noble, so long as he best suits her need.

And so, in spite of the fact that every one was against her love for

Trevor Bruce, Louise thought herself supremely fortunate, little guessing that even now she had a long way to go before she came out of the shadows that still clouded her heart and happiness.



"Perhaps he hasn't told you, but I was with him all night!"

It was when she was out for a walk that afternoon that she suddenly thought of Lionel Swindon.

It was amazing what a real affection she felt for Swindon in spite of the fact that she really knew very little of him, and she was conscious of a pang as she realized what a great tragedy Mercia's death must have been to him.

He was such a quiet man that he would probably show very little of what he felt, but something seemed to tell Louise that her death would strike deeply. She wished she could see him again.

And then, by one of the strange coincidences of life, she saw him coming along the path toward her!

He looked ill; that was her first thought even as she quickened her step eagerly to meet him. And then something seemed to tell her that had it been possible he would have gone on without speaking, only she had already prevented him from doing so.

"Mr. Swindon. I was just thinking about you."

He smiled faintly. "That is kind of you, my little friend. I have found myself thinking about you a great deal lately."

There was an awkward silence, then Louise said impulsively, "Can't we walk a little way together? Or have tea as we did before?"

And once again she had the feeling that he wanted to refuse—that some excuse was on his lips before he half shrugged his shoulders and said mechanically that nothing would please him better.

"It shall be tea," he decided. "I believe I'm getting old. I'm very tired, anyway."

"He looks it, poor soul," Louise thought compassionately.

She thought he had got very thin, and there were lines about his kind eyes that had not been there a year ago.

And it was all Trevor's doing. She realized that fact with a touch of bitterness. It was strange how the actions of one man could be so far-reaching, bringing sorrow into the lives of so many innocent people.

TEA was a poor pretense; they sat silently in the corner of the quiet tea shop which Louise had chosen, till suddenly she laid a hand on Swindon's arm and said, "I want to say I'm so sorry."

She felt his arm jerk a little beneath her touch, but he answered quite calmly, "Thank you. I know." He smiled a little, looking at her.

"I am afraid none of us will come out of this without some suffering."

Louise did not answer at once, then she said, "I suppose you know that Trevor and I are...we are going to be married soon."

It seemed a long time before he answered, and Louise was amazed at the acute distress in his face when he spoke.

"No—I did not know."

She felt a little fluttering pulse in her throat.

"I know what you are thinking—what every one thinks, but I love him," she said bravely. "I told you that last time we met, if you remember—that I should always love him."

"Yes."

He was sitting with his hands clasped, and suddenly Louise saw them tighten so that the knuckles stood out white.

"Then all this—tragedy must be doubly distressing for you," he said.

Louise looked away from him across the little room.

"I should like you to know," she said slowly, "that the night the—the night before last I was with Trevor—in his apartment—all night."

As the seconds passed and Swindon did not speak, she turned her head slowly and looked at him.

His face was very pale, with an odd strained look, and the thought went flashing through Louise's mind that he did not believe her—that like Agatha he thought she was just lying to save Trevor; to save him from what?

"It's quite true," she said again gently. "I was with him till past three o'clock, and then he took me home. There are other people who can prove what I say. So you see—

he couldn't...it wasn't..." She stopped and found herself trembling. "Oh, Mr. Swindon," she appealed, almost in a whisper. "Surely *you* don't believe that Trevor had anything... that he—" She could not go on, but after a moment she found her voice again and asked brokenly, "What *are* you thinking? Please tell me what you are thinking?"

He laid his hand over hers.

"I am thinking that Trevor is luckier than he deserves to be," he said. "And you are not eating anything."

The little moment of tragedy had gone. Louise drew a long breath and her tense body relaxed.

How foolish she had been, how utterly foolish to imagine for a moment... They were just normal people, having tea together in a little ordinary shop bright with flowers and shaded lamps, and yet for an instant the world and her heart had seemed to stand still with nameless fear.

But there was still something she felt she must say.

"Perhaps it will sound cruel to you, but I want you to know that in spite of everything I am going to be happy. You said we were friends, and if friends understand one another there isn't any need to hide things or to pretend, is there?"

"My dear child, nobody wishes you greater happiness than I do."

She felt sudden tears in her eyes. "I know, and yet...you've lost yours."

He made no answer to that, and again Louise longed to know if he had really cared for Mercia—if perhaps it was only now, when she was dead, that he realized how much he had cared for her.

"If you've finished your tea," Swindon suggested presently, and Louise hastily drew on her gloves.

They went out into the street together, gray now with gathering twilight.

"I'll get you a taxi," Swindon said, but Louise refused.

"I'd much rather walk."

"Then I'll say good-by."

Louise held out her hand and it seemed almost as if he did not wish to take it; then with a little smile he just touched it and let it go.

"Good-by..."

"I shall see you again," she said quickly. "Won't you come and see us some day?"

"Perhaps—later on. Thank you for asking me. Good-by."

He raised his hat and turned away, but Louise stood for a moment looking after him, conscious of a great desire to recall him. But already he had crossed the road and was lost in the crowd, and with a little sigh she, too, went on, wondering why she felt so sure that she and Lionel Swindon would never meet again.

WHEN she reached home there was a car standing at the gate, and her father and another man were just entering the house.

The pater had come home early, apparently, and Louise called to him as she realized that he had not seen her and was about to shut the door. He turned, waited for her, and the other man waited, too. Inside the hall her father said:

"This is my daughter." But he did not introduce the man by name. "I want to speak to you a moment, my dear," he went on rather hurriedly. "Come into the study, will you?"

And when they were all in the study he shut the door, and threw off his coat, and pulled a chair forward for Louise.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he said, and she hardly knew his voice, it was so gentle. "This gentleman is making inquiries about the death of Swindon's poor wife, and he wants to ask you a few questions."

"Yes," Louise said, but she disregarded the chair, and stood stiffly waiting.

She looked at the strange man with unfaltering eyes.

"Perhaps Mr. Bruce has not told you that I was with him the night Mrs. Swindon died," she said. "That I was with him all night — until three o'clock."

The pater gave a stifled exclamation.

"Louise...you're mad. Stark, staring..."

She smiled a little. "It's quite true, father. I went to him after you and Agatha went out, and I stayed till past three. He brought me home." She was sure of herself now. "Hasn't Trevor told you?" She looked from one man to the other. "If you don't believe me you can find the taxi man who drove us home—or you can ask a Mr. Hedley who lives just below Trevor. We met him at the door as we were leaving."

The strange man asked sharply: "Mr. Hedley?"

"Yes; he lives on the floor below Mr. Bruce."

The man cleared his throat.

"Mr. Bruce has told us about meeting a Mr. Hedley," he said. "But not that you were with him."

"And have you seen Mr. Hedley?" Louise asked. "And questioned him?"

The man cleared his throat again—he had hard eyes that made Louise shiver.

"Unfortunately we are not able to question Mr. Hedley," he said uncompromisingly. "He was killed in a motor accident last night."

CHAPTER XVI

HER father was so kind to her.

During the hours that followed, Louise wondered dully why she had never realized what a heart of gold her father kept hidden away beneath his gruff exterior. For the first time she found herself able to understand why it was that her mother had put up with all his tiresome ways and loved him in spite of them. Being such a contradiction himself, she marveled that he could not understand and sympathize with her love for Bruce.

Why was it he did not understand that beneath all Trevor's recklessness and foolhardiness there was something sterling — something which perhaps only she had found?

When they were alone she asked:

"Of course they think Bruce killed Mercia?"

Wonderful that she could at last speak of the vague dread that had been for so long in her heart—speak of it without any emotion or shrinking.

The pater ran a finger round the inside of his collar.

"They have to suspect some one," he mumbled. "And Bruce seems the most likely. He was the last to see her, and he admits that they had quarreled because he was going away and would not take her. My dear, I don't want to make things harder for you—"

Louise smiled. "You don't, dear. I know he had nothing to do with it, whatever people say. I never thought for a moment he had, though I knew every one was thinking it—" She passed a hand across her eyes as if to clear away the clouds of perplexity that were confusing her.

"What is the next thing they will do?" she asked.

The pater shrugged his shoulders.

"There will be an inquest, and Bruce will be told to attend, and then it will be for the coroner to make every inquiry." He walked away from her and stared hard at the inkstand on his writing table before he went on.

"I don't want to keep anything from you—or pretend that things do not look black. It seems to me as if the police must have some other knowledge which they are keeping back. If that is so—well..."

"You mean—he may be arrested?"

Her father's face was red with distress.

"They will have to get very conclusive evidence against him before they do that, of course, my dear," he said evasively. "You see his record is not of the best—"

The letter was still clutched in her hand when Agatha found her

Louise broke in passionately.

"You mean — *you* think he killed her?"

"My dear child—"

He saw the agony in her eyes, and he made a swift movement toward her.

"My poor little girl—"

He put his arms around her, pressing her head to his shoulder, stroking her

hair. "There, there—we'll do all we can for him if the worst comes to the worst. I promise you that. Perhaps I've been too hard on him—your mother used to say I was always too hard on people—"

"He didn't do it—he didn't—" Louise sobbed over and over again. "Don't think I'm afraid, or that I think he did—I'm only so afraid that they may not be fair to him—that they'll bring up all sorts of things that will make it look worse than it is. I know him better than any one else—I know he *couldn't* do a thing like that—he just couldn't."

"No, no—" He soothed her clumsily. "We mustn't cross bridges before we come to them. It will be all right—you'll see. It will be all right—"

But at the back of his mind he was thinking furiously.

"The scoundrel — the unspeakable cad—to drag my little girl into a thing like this. If it wasn't for her I'd like to see him hanged—he deserves it—the unspeakable cad."

HE said as much to Agatha later on in the evening, when Louise had gone to her room, utterly worn out.

"What she can see in the fellow I'm hanged if I know," he raved, pacing up and down the room.

He had had a few cocktails by then, and was feeling very sorry for himself. "A nice thing—a daughter of mine having to go to an inquest and tell a coroner's jury that she spent the night with a man who, for all we know, may be hanging by his neck soon. To think I should have such a disgrace brought on me. I've always been respected—one of the most respected men in New York I flatter myself—"

"You're thinking of yourself—not of Louise at all," Agatha told him calmly, though she was far from feeling calm.

"What does it matter about you?" she went on. "You've had your life, and Louise is only a child. If you ask me I think you're a good deal to blame for this. You've never troubled to understand her or make a friend of her. You've always bullied her and shouted at her, and I should like you to know before you say any more that I'm entirely on her side, and that I hope she and Trevor will marry and show you that you've been entirely wrong about them both!"

Her brother tried to speak, but he was too taken aback. That a woman should dare to stand up to him was something he had never contemplated even in his maddest moments, and while he was searching his furious mind for words with which to reply, Agatha slipped away and left him.

She went up to Louise and found her fast asleep, her face turned in against the pillow like a tired child.

Agatha sat down beside her and closed her eyes.

Life was a queer, bitter thing, she thought. Here was this girl whose only fault was that she loved a man too well, suddenly dragged into a storm of tragedy, the end of which nobody could foresee.

Agatha loved her niece; although she was quiet and rather reserved, she had given Louise all the love which she had never been allowed to expend on other people, and she felt that she would give the rest of her life if only by doing so she could straighten things out and see this girl happy.

But there was nothing she could do to help her—nothing. That was how life had always served her; forcing her

to stand by and see those whom she most loved, facing shipwreck, and knowing herself powerless to help.

Louise stirred restlessly, and sighed as if about to open her eyes, then suddenly she relaxed and was asleep again.

And Agatha, sitting there in the darkness, almost found it in her heart to wish that she might never waken again if fresh tragedy and heartbreak was all that lay in store for her.

LOUISE was down very early the next morning. She had been awake since dawn, longing for the day to come, and yet dreading it.

She had made up her mind what she would do; she would go to Trevor and say, "Let's get married. At once. Today." She would show the world how great was her trust in him, and then, as his wife, she would be able to face whatever was to come.

Her father looked at her anxiously when they met at breakfast.

"Sleep well, my dear?"

"Oh, yes; thank you."

Louise thought her father rather pathetic; he seemed much more nervous and apprehensive than she was; once when the doorbell rang he started violently, and later, when there was a telephone call, he broke out irritably, "Damn the phone! I'll have the thing cut off." But it proved to be only a business call.

"Any one would think the police were after *him*, wouldn't they?" Louise said to Agatha with a faint smile, when he had gone to answer it.

Agatha shivered.

"I'm not going to the office this morning," the pater announced when he returned. "I'm going to have a day at home. Damn it all—" he broke out furiously as he met Louise's understanding eyes. "Can't I take a day off occasionally if I want to? It's not once in a lifetime I do such a thing." He was more angry, because he knew his irritation deceived neither Louise or Agatha; he muttered something about women having no sense of proportion as he went off to his study and shut the door with a slam.

"Poor darling," Louise said with a little laugh.

"What are you going to do this morning?" Agatha asked. "If you'd like to go out—"

"I want to go out alone," Louise said.

There was a little silence, and as if she could read the girl's thoughts, Agatha said:

"Don't do anything reckless. I know how you feel, but as things are—"

"As things are," Louise caught her up quickly. "There isn't much time to waste. Oh, can't you see that every moment is precious?"

"Let me come with you, then," Agatha begged. "I'll do anything to help you, you must know that."

Louise got up suddenly and went round to her and kissed her.

"I know, but you can't help. Besides—I'd rather go alone."

"My dear, if they are watching him..."

There was a little tragic silence, then Louise said again, "I'd rather go alone please—"

"If your father sees you go out—"

"He won't. You can talk to him—keep him occupied—will you, Agatha?"

"Louise, tell me what are you going to do?"

"Just what you would do in my place."

"My dear, you're such a child."

Louise sighed.

"If you knew how old I feel," she said.

She went upstairs and put on her hat and coat. Agatha had gone to the study and Louise could hear her father's voice talking angrily as she crept downstairs.

She opened the door quietly, and was out on the step before she saw that a taxicab had stopped at the gate and that a man was coming quickly up the path; a man who broke into an eager run as he saw Louise—it was Silas!

HE caught her round the waist and drew her back into the house before she could resist him; in his excitement at seeing her again he forgot his shyness.

"I had to come straight to you. There was no letter, though I was sure there would be."

He held her at arm's length and looked her up and down.

"Louise, it's great to see you again."

"I didn't know you were coming to-day. I was going to write."

"You got my letter? And the cable?"

"Yes."

She wanted to tear her hands from his and cry out, "Go away; oh, go away and leave me alone. You're wasting time—precious time. Please go away"; but it seemed so cruel. He was taking off his coat as if sure he would be asked to stay—he went on talking, more eloquent than she had ever known him.

"Were you going out? I'm sorry, but I must talk to you. Oh, it's fine to be back again—I feel as if I'd been away years."

Louise led the way into the drawing-room; she wondered if Agatha or the pater had seen him drive up to the house.

Silas shut the door behind him and followed her over to the fire.

"Are you glad to see me? Just a little? Not as glad as I am, of course, but—" He tried to take her hand again, but Louise drew away, facing him desperately.

"I meant to write and tell you, but ...oh, don't look at me like that—" His face had gone white, as if he knew instinctively what she was going to say.

He broke out hoarsely, "You're not going to send me away! You don't know how I've just lived for this moment...Louise—"

"I'm going to be married," Louise stated.

It seemed kinder to tell him at once, she thought in despair, than to let him run on in his joyous welcome, and yet she almost cried out in pain when she saw the sudden shock in his eyes.

"*Married?*" he echoed dazedly.

"Yes—I ought to have written, but I didn't want to hurt you— It's true ...I'm going to marry Trevor Bruce."

He stared at her dumbly, and she said again:

"I was engaged to him before — I told you."

He cried out then, "Not that man!"

"Yes. I'm sorry—but..."

He broke in almost rudely, "The man in the Swindon case. I've been reading about him—the papers are full of him this morning...Louise, for God's sake, not that man!"

AND then as she said nothing he lost his self-control. He had looked forward to this meeting with such passionate eagerness and hope—and now to have all that hope killed in a moment was more than he could bear. He begged her not to break his heart and ruin his life — he said

over and over again that he had only lived for this moment—

"You must love me, you *must!* I've been so patient — you can't send me away like this. Oh, Louise, I beg of you—"

The tears were running down her face; she had not thought he would feel it so terribly. She had suffered so much herself that she could understand only too well how he was suffering now.

"I can't...I can't—" she said brokenly. "I don't love you and I do love him. I've always loved him."

Silas stood back a step; he was breathing heavily.

"You love that — that..." he checked the word on his lips and suddenly began pleading again. "You can't love him—he's not worth it. I know how he treated you before; he's not fit for you to marry. They may arrest him after the inquest to-morrow—you've only got to read the papers to see it's expected. I read it all coming up in the train. You're mad, Louise; even if you don't care for me, for your own sake you couldn't marry a cad like that—"

Louise tore her hands from his, her cheeks crimson and her eyes blazing.

"How dare you, how dare you," she panted. "Oh, go away before I tell you how much I hate you; daring to speak of him like that!"

There was a tragic silence. Silas looked almost stupefied; then with a great effort he pulled himself together.

"Hate me," he laughed hoarsely. "Hate me, do you?...well, I shall remember that."

He stared at her almost as if she was a stranger to him, then turning sharply he was out of the room before she could stop him.

Louise heard his heavy footsteps in the hall, and then the closing of the front door behind him, and at that little final sound all her courage failed her. She sank down by the fire, sobbing uncontrollably. She felt that she could bear no more, that she had reached the end of endurance.

The thought of to-morrow and all it might bring forth was a nightmare which she had courageously kept at bay until now, but its magnitude had engulfed her at last. To-morrow they would tear her heart out with their searching questions and the horrible things they would impute to Trevor. The past which she had tried so hard to forget would be dragged up for an unfriendly world to see, and she was powerless to protect the man she loved.

And presently Agatha found her, and she went down on her knees and gathered Louise in her arms as if she had been a child, kissing her and speaking soothing words, till gradually she was calmer.

Then Agatha said gently, "You mustn't give way now, my dear. You've been so brave, and you'll want all your courage."

"I know, but I couldn't help it." She lay crouched against her aunt's shoulder, her eyes closed. "I shall be all right in a moment. But it seemed the last straw when Silas came."

"I know. I saw him go."

"I said I hated him," Louise whispered.

"He will know you didn't mean it. Poor boy, he is unhappy, too, you know, Louise."

"I know."

PRESENTLY Louise raised herself with a little sigh. "What a fool I am, crying like this. Don't tell father, Agatha dear."

"My love, of course not."

"If only it was over—to-morrow, I mean."

"It may not be so bad," Agatha said gently. "And you'll have Donald—he's coming—pater heard this morning."

Louise's eyes lit up. Donald was Trevor's friend—it would be a great comfort to have her brother near.

She was silent for a moment, then she said:

"I shan't go to Trevor after all. I think he would rather I didn't, but I meant to, you know—" She looked at Agatha with pitiful defiance. "I was going to ask him to marry me—to-day. Do you think he would have?"

"My dear, how do I know?"

Louise stood up, straightening her ruffled hair.

"Everything's been against us all the time," she said hopelessly. "It's fate, I suppose. If it hadn't been, Mr. Hedley wouldn't have been killed. I believe that man who came to question me was glad about it...I believe he wants to get all the evidence he can against Trevor—"

"Don't say that, dear!"

"It's true. I suppose they've got to make some one guilty," Louise said bitterly. "Oh, if I could only be with him."

"Please God, you will soon be with him for always," Agatha said, but her heart was heavy.

The pater's pessimism had affected her.

"Guilty, of course he's guilty," he had declared only a few moments ago. "But for Louise's sake I hope he gets off . . . what satisfaction there will be in seeing my only daughter married to a scoundrel like that, even supposing he does get off, God only knows. Think of the scandal and the disgrace! There will be people who will always think he did it even if it's not proven... Why she couldn't fall in love with that young Englishman beats me—look at his money."

Agatha could almost find it in her heart to echo the pater's words now as she looked at Louise's pitiful face.

It seemed such waste—such tragic waste.

"If only to-morrow were over," she thought desperately. She dreaded it as much as if she herself were in Louise's position.

"If anything happens to Trevor it will kill her," she thought.

"And now I'm going to wash and behave sensibly," Louise said with an effort. "There's really nothing to cry for—I *know* it's going to be all right."

Brave sounding words, when her heart was torn with doubt—not doubt of Trevor, but of what the world might do to him.

She went out into the hall, walking softly lest her father hear her. Lying on the table was a letter addressed to herself.

She took it up without interest; the handwriting was strange. It began, "My dear little friend—"

Louise turned the page hurriedly and glanced at the signature. It was from Lionel Swindon.

MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND:

By the time this letter reaches you I shall be beyond your pity or your forgiveness, though I feel in the great kindness and generosity of your heart both would be mine were I here to ask for them. Although I know you understand the meaning of a great love, I hope you may never be called upon to understand the meaning of a great hate or the longing for revenge. When I tell you that I loved my wife more than I ever believed it possible to love any woman, and that I hated the man who took her from me as I never thought it possible to hate any man, perhaps

you will be able to guess the rest. Louise, I went to my wife the night she died, and asked her to come back to me. I believe people thought I did not care when all the trouble came last spring, but you will believe me when I tell you that I have never had a moment's peace or happiness since. Well, she refused—she laughed at me and said she was leaving that night with Bruce. Can you guess what happened? I think you can. If I had not met you yesterday and realized how much that man meant to you, I should have let things go on as I hoped and intended they would go. I should have let suspicion rest on the man who ruined my life. But you made that impossible, and so by the time you get this I shall be beyond your pity or forgiveness. I shall leave a letter in my room at the hotel with a full confession so that you need not be drawn further into the tragedy which has wrecked my life, but which I shall not allow to wreck yours.

LIONEL SWINDON.

When Agatha came out of the drawing-room a moment later, Louise was standing by the hall table, the letter clutched in her hand, her eyes staring blankly before her, and even her lips were white.

Agatha spoke to her in sharp alarm. "Louise—what is it? Louise?"

Louise tried to speak, but she swayed as if some one had struck her, and Agatha was just in time to catch her before she fell.

Forever

LOW-SLUNG moon, and your eyes as soft—
Perfumed air—your own sweet breath;
Stars a-throbbing there aloft
As still as death.

Rustling whisper of dew-damp leaves;
Haunting melody of night;
Magic artistry that weaves
A golden light.

Journey's end, and the heart's own choice,
Murmured vows inscribed in gold,
Memory of your dear, dear voice
To have and to hold.

—Bert Murray Fliegman

His Now and Then Girl

He caught her to him, and their lips met in a throbbing kiss!

If she could have known the ways of his glittering world, Laurie's new sweetheart would never have found heartache—or love!

By Doris Knight Jessee

Author of "Sweethearts for Sale," etc.

CORAL BAYNE huddled in a miserable little heap on the big couch. The glass doors leading into the living room were opened a trifle. That was why she could hear the cruel words so distinctly.

"Oh, she's just Laurie's now-and-then girl!" said a girl's voice.

"But who *is* she?" asked another girl.

"Her name is Coral, or Doral, or some such idiotic thing. Did you ever see such a frock? My dear, isn't it priceless?"

"Looks as if she was all dressed up to play charades!" The speaker's laughter rippled out, sweeping over Corel in recurring waves of misery that left her buffeted and spent.

"I suppose she made it herself; but it isn't the dress that's the funniest. It's the dying-catfish way she looks at Laurie. Honestly, did you ever see such fish eyes? Evidently she's simply wild over him. Poor little idiot, she

probably doesn't know that she's just the now-and-then. Laurie is *such* a flirt, but she wouldn't have sense enough to know that. I'll wager she thinks she's the one and only. I wouldn't put it by Laurie to pull that line; but I can't see why he insisted on bringing her here to my party. She certainly doesn't belong!"

Corel put her hand against her trembling lips—quickly—to shut out the sound of the little hurt moan. She had known that she didn't fit in with this crowd of sophisticated girls and sleek, dinner-jacketed men. She had realized that there was a big dividing line between a girl who worked in a little hole-in-the-wall hat shop and one whose father had offices in Wall Street; but she had been so happy when Laurie Wells had invited her to come to this party given by Mona Cleavering in her penthouse apartment, perched twenty stories above the hurry and bustle and noise of Manhattan.

For three nights Corel had sat up until after one o'clock, sewing on the dress that these girls thought so funny. She hadn't thought it funny. She had adored it. The goods were a soft length of filmy pink chiffon, difficult to sew, but beautiful when it was finished —or so Corel had thought. She had bought the material at a bargain, since the four yards happened to be a remnant. Carefully she had followed the pattern—a rounding neck, tiny puff sleeves, with little bows cunningly placed, a fitted-in waist that clung to her slender body, and a long, filmy skirt made with innumerable ruffles that had been almost too much for Corel's inexperienced fingers. Yes, she had thought the dress adorable—and it had turned out to be just a home-made joke!

Tears made their way down Corel's cheeks and fell unheeded on the despised frock.

"DON'T!" said some one close by. "I hate to see women cry. It just spoils my whole day."

Corel started.

"Oh!" she said. "I—I didn't know there was anybody else out here on this veranda."

"There isn't any one," said the man blithely. "I don't count."

He went over and shut the glass doors, so that Corel couldn't hear the rest of the cruel things Mona and her friends were saying. Then he came and sat down beside her on the big, comfortable couch.

"I'm just Jerry Kingdon," he explained. "I work for Mr. Cleavering down on the Street."

"Oh!"

"Don't be too much impressed!" His tone sounded cynical. "I'm just a sort of glorified office boy around the place. I don't exactly sweep up and open the offices in the morning, but I do almost everything else."

He grinned.

"Then how—" Corel began, and stopped short. She had been on the point of asking: "Then how under Heaven do you happen to be at this high-hat party?" But she caught herself just in time.

Jerry chuckled.

"I know what you were going to say. You were wondering how I horned in on this affair. Simplest thing ever. Whenever Mona—Miss Cleavering, that is—needs an extra man at any of her parties, her dad gives me the royal command, and I obey. I happen to own this tux, you see—a relic of my college days, when I wasn't as broke as I am now. But why talk about me, when you would be so much

more interesting? Why the flood of tears? Are you crying because those cats inside in the living room unsheathed their claws a bit?"

Corel hesitated. This young man was friendly and evidently sincere. She liked him.

"I'm not crying any more," she said, and smiled through her tears to prove that she wasn't. "Only they said my dress was—was funny!"

"Funny!" Jerry's voice sounded odd. "Why, don't you know that you look like a princess in a fairy tale? That frock, with the moon glow on it, and your hair so golden! I'm glad there are no lights out here. If I could see you better, I'd probably be so dazzled that I wouldn't dare to talk to you at all."

"Do—do you talk to every one like that?" Corel said, with a hint of a quaver in her voice.

"Only on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays," replied Jerry gravely.

They laughed together.

JUST then the glass doors swung open and a group of the guests trooped out.

"How absurd of Perkins not to have turned on the lights out here!" said Mona Cleavering.

She touched a button, and immediately the veranda was flooded with electricity, shutting out the pale glow of the moon, and making the place seem like an ordinary porch twenty stories above the ground. A moment before, Corel had felt as if it were a tower of enchantment builded high on a castle of dreams.

She looked at Jerry. His eyes were a grayish green, his hair a sleek black. He wasn't so good-looking, but somehow he impressed you as a dependable fellow—the sort you'd want for a brother, for instance. He wasn't at all like Laurie!

She caught her breath as she looked at Laurie. He was laughing and talking with Mona Cleavering. His eyes were amber and his hair was tan. He had a chin that was firm, a mouth that was coaxing, and a way about him that counted for more than his good looks.

He saw Corel almost at the same instant as she glimpsed him.

"Hello, sweet!" he said, and sauntered over, abandoning Mona as casually as if she hadn't existed.

That made Corel's heart give a little surge of joy. Laurie loved her! Of course he did! Didn't he tell her so, time after time?

"Been looking all over for you," Laurie went on, as he sat down on the couch between Corel and Jerry. He didn't speak to Jerry at all. "How about coming inside for a glass of punch?"

He patted Corel's hand with a carelessly possessive gesture that sent little quivers of excitement up and down her spine.

"Of course," she said.

Forgetting all about Jerry, she followed Laurie in through the glass doors without a backward glance or an "Excuse me" to the other man. She thought only of Laurie and how she loved him.

"Every one's out on the veranda," said Laurie, when they were seated in the little room that Mona called her den. "That's why I brought you in here. I'm just starved for a kiss! Too bad we had to take that other couple along; but it couldn't be helped. Bill just naturally invited himself. That's the worst of owning a Rolls!"

Was there the least bit of self-satisfied pride in Laurie's voice at the mention of the make of his car?

Corel thrust the idea from her mind hastily.

"But now!" He caught her close in his embrace and pressed his lips to hers. After a moment, Corel pushed against his chest with little futile hands. Laurie released her and laughed a little. "Can't stand very much loving, can you, baby?"

Corel didn't exactly know why she wanted Laurie to stop kissing her. The thought of his caresses always made her head swim, and after his kisses she dreamed about them for hours; but at the time—well, she drew away. She wasn't conscious that she was going to be so silly. She always intended to let Laurie kiss her as much as he wanted to; but when the time came—

"You—take my breath away!" she murmured, looking up at him.

"Sweet baby! You're so different from the rest!"

He caught her tightly to him and gave her another throbbing kiss. Corel trembled. She didn't like the shivery feeling of—was it fear?—that Laurie's kisses aroused in her.

"The—rest?" she faltered. Laurie had said the same thing many times before, and Corel, wrapped in a secure mantle of dreams, had not heeded; but now, with Mona Cleavering's stinging words still echoing in her ears, she began to wonder. "Have you known so many girls, Laurie?" she asked wistfully.

HE laughed.

"Baby, you're too naïve for words at times! Of course, I've had a million love affairs. Who hasn't? But you're the one who's ace high with me; so why should you worry about your predecessors?"

"Oh!"

The exclamation was such a tiny breath of sound that Laurie didn't even hear it. Corel felt as if a knife had pierced her heart; but he went on, all unheeding:

"I've got a treat for you, Corel. Look!" He drew a couple of pasteboards from his pocket. "Tickets for 'Gypsy Love,' the play you wanted to see so much. Allow me to state that I had to pull all wires to get these tickets, too. The show is a sell-out for six weeks ahead; but I always manage things like that." His voice sounded consciously pleased. "These are for to-morrow night."

"That's marvelous!"

Corel forgot her worry in her joy at the thought that the man who cared for her was powerful enough to pull wires and obtain the impossible, merely because she had expressed a wish.

"You keep the tickets. I'd be sure to forget them—just like I did the last time."

He chuckled, quite unaware that he was touching a chord of memory better left alone. They had arrived at the theater, only to find that Laurie had forgotten the tickets. Instead of going home for them, he had been so angry that he took Corel straight back to her dingy boarding house and said good night. She had been so hurt and disappointed that she cried all night; but the next morning a big bouquet of roses had come to the hat store. Laurie's card had been attached, with a single word—"sorry"—scrawled across his name. The other girls in the shop had been openly envious, and Corel had been terribly thrilled; so the incident had been almost forgotten—until now.

At the time, however, Corel had almost decided that she would never go out with Laurie again. He had been so furious about forgetting the tickets!

Despite the fact that it had been all his fault, he turned on her and blamed her for not reminding him. There had been plenty of time for him to drive back and get them, but he wouldn't do it. He just sulked, and utterly spoiled the delightful evening on which Corel had been counting so much.

"All right," Corel said, grasping the tickets slowly. "I'll take care of them. Just a moment until I put them in my purse."

She made her way through the labyrinth of rooms that Mona called her "tiny apartment" until she came to the bedroom where the girls' wraps had been deposited. She thrust the precious pasteboards into her hand bag, and snapped the catch. Then she put some powder on her nose and added a touch of rouge to her wistful mouth. There wasn't any need for rouge on her cheeks. They were always flushed and rosy with excitement when she went out with Laurie. She was so much in love with him! Dear Laurie! She resolved to let him kiss her just as long as he liked, when she went back to the den.

But when she came hurrying back, Laurie wasn't alone. A tall girl, with hair like a raven's wing, and a dress that shimmered and glittered under the electric light, was standing quite close to him.

"Laurie, I'm surprised at you!" she was saying.

Her tone was mocking, but her dark eyes weren't. They were smoldering with hidden rage. She had wonderful control of her temper, thought Corel, with a queer little catch of her heart. Why, *why*, was this gorgeous girl so terribly angry with Laurie?

"My dear, you didn't expect me to wear sackcloth and ashes and live in a monastery while you were picking apple blossoms in the country, did you?"

"I don't know what I expected," said the gorgeous girl slowly; "but I do know one thing—either you'll behave yourself and leave other girls alone, or you'll take back this!"

She stripped a ring from her left hand, and held it out toward Laurie.

"Don't be absurd, Claire!" Laurie's voice sounded scared. "You know nobody means anything to me—nobody but you."

"I understand that your sort could never be absolutely true!" The gorgeous girl flung the words at him as if they were little sharp knives. "I never expect to find out about your—sweethearts. That isn't done, Laurie. You ought to know that; but the idea of bringing this shop girl to Mona's party—that's too much, Laurie Wells! See the girl if you must, but don't you dare to bring her into my set!"

With a contemptuous gesture she tossed the ring on the floor, and sauntered out.

COREL'S hand flew to her throat. She had been numbed for an instant. She hadn't quite taken in what all this meant; but she realized now. Laurie had never been in love with her. All the pretty speeches, all the kisses, all the sweet memories were lies, every one of them. All the time Laurie had been in love with this glittering girl of his own world. That was why he sometimes disappeared and didn't come to see Corel for weeks. He always had a good excuse, and she had believed him; but she shouldn't have done so.

What was it that Mona Cleavering had called her? A now-and-then girl—that was it. Laurie had taken her out now and then, when his other girl was

away—his real girl, the one he was engaged to. Corel sobbed silently.

Laurie was down on his knees, fumbling about for something. Her ring, of course—the gorgeous girl's ring. Corel turned with a little broken-hearted cry, and began making her way back to the bedroom where the wraps were. Her eyes were blinded with tears, but she found the place somehow. She snatched up her worn coat and her purse and hurried out. If she could only get away before any one noticed her!

The crowd were still out on the veranda. She darted to the door that led to the apartment, and jerked it wide. Some one came dashing after her.

"Wait a minute!" called Jerry Kingdon. "I'm coming, too!"

He took her arm in a possessive manner, and didn't appear to notice the tears at all. Corel didn't pay much heed. She was glad to have some one with her, but she didn't really care. Laurie wasn't any good. Laurie wasn't worthy.

How lonely she felt without Laurie to think about! For six months she had dreamed about him at night and thought about him all day. He was like a brilliant thread of color running through the drabness of her days in the little hat shop. He was romance and love and hope to Corel; but now she was alone in a world that was gray and dead. Romance was dead, love had never been, and hope lay mortally wounded against her heart.

"How about wiping your eyes?" said Jerry, thrusting his clean handkerchief into her doubled fist. "It really doesn't do a bit of good to cry. It just makes your nose red, and doesn't help matters a bit."

She hardly heard him, but she obediently wiped her eyes on his handkerchief. They were in the marble-floored foyer now, with its palms and stately Queen Anne chairs. The doorman swung open the door.

"Taxi, sir?"

Jerry nodded. The fellow blew his whistle, and a taxi scurried up. Jerry gave him a coin, and they stepped in.

"Where do we go?" asked Jerry; but when Corel told him her address, he sighed. "Just my luck!" he murmured, as he repeated the address to the driver, and they started off with a jerk.

"What's just your luck?" inquired Corel, momentarily forgetting that the world was a place of misery and pain, and that life was over for her.

"Just my luck for you to live out in the uttermost ramparts of Flatbush, when I have two dollars and sixty-five cents in my pocket," said Jerry frankly. "I'm watching that meter. The minute it gets to two sixty, out we get. I'm saving out a nickel for me to get home on the subway, you see."

"Why not take the subway now, both of us?" suggested Corel. "It—it's awfully nice of you to take the trouble to see me home, anyway. I—I appreciate it."

Her voice broke a little on the last word.

"I wish I was rich!" Jerry's tone was vicious. "It's heck to be poor and not be able to get everything in the world for the girl you—you like. Moon-glow girl, don't you realize that I've been waiting all my life for a girl like you? To-night, when I found you out there on that veranda, with the moonlight enfolding you, I—well, my heart just naturally turned upside down. Then, when I discovered that you loved some one else—"

He turned his head away.

"Oh, please don't feel badly!" She laid her hand on his arm. She couldn't bear to see any one else caught in this mysterious web of love that was so treacherous and caused such pain. "You—you're just saving my life now, taking me home like this."

"I followed you indoors," said Jerry, staring out of the window. "I caught a glimpse of your face when —when Wells was kissing you. Then I saw that there was no hope for me, and I didn't feel like staying any longer; so I got my hat, and was just saying good-by to Mona Cleavering, when I saw you hurrying away. Is—is there anything I could do to help?"

"Not a thing," said Corel in a hard little voice that she didn't recognize as her own. "I've found out that love is a snare and a delusion. There isn't any such thing as true love. There's fascination, and there's flirting; but real, genuine love is just a myth."

"You believe that?" he asked, turning to face her.

"I most certainly do!" she snapped.

"Some day you will know how wrong you are," Jerry told her gravely.

THEY were crossing Manhattan Bridge just then. Corel looked down at the lights on the crafts scudding along. She saw the dim outlines of the buildings over in Brooklyn. She watched the brilliancy of an illuminated advertisement fade from white to green and from green to red. One of the tallest buildings had a tower that was a shining bit of beauty, lighted by a misty pinkish glow. Ever after she remembered the beauty of that tower, for it was just then that Jerry kissed her.

He took her into his arms very gently—as if she was something infinitely precious that he was afraid of shattering with his touch. Then he bent his head until his lips caressed hers—so gently, so sweetly! Twice he kissed her, then his arms loosed her, and Corel felt a sudden sense of loss. For a moment she had been sheltered from the woes of life. For the brief space of a kiss she had known the truest happiness that can be found. She was breathless and shaken—not with a vague fear and unrest, as she had been with Laurie, but with a joy that thrilled her.

"That is love," said Jerry softly, as if in answer to her thoughts. "I don't expect you to understand it now, but some day you will. You still fancy that you love Wells. Your spirit is bruised and crushed by the fact that he failed you; but later you may realize that what you have gone through has just been a preliminary to true love. True love does exist—the sort of love that gives and doesn't expect to take, the love that sacrifices and believes, and doesn't demand."

Somehow Corel couldn't think of anything to say. The words choked in her throat, and everything seemed to whirl about madly. Had she been just deluding herself into thinking she cared for Laurie? Had his money and his gorgeous car, and his flowers and his arrogant manner dazzled her into thinking that she cared? If she had really loved him, how could she have been so stirred by the gentle, sweet kisses of this stranger?

"I'm going to ask you to marry me some day, moon-glow girl," Jerry was saying.

"Your love is—as sure—as that?" faltered Corel. "Why, you don't know anything about me—nothing at all!"

"I know that you are the one girl in the world for me," replied Jerry

quietly. "There never will be any other. I've been waiting for you all my life; and when I saw you to-night —*I knew!*"

"Excuse *me,*" broke in the cab driver, "but I couldn't help overhearing what you said a while ago. Take a look at that meter, 'bo!"

The purse was gone! Fear tightened about her heart

"Two sixty-five!" exclaimed Jerry. "Geewhillikins!"

"Oh, stop, please!" said Corel.

The cab jerked to a standstill, and in silence the two got out. Jerry handed over his money, and the cab roared off. They looked at each other.

"This is a terrible come-down from the realms of love," said Jerry.

Corel could see that he was gallantly trying to joke, but that his lack of money galled him horribly. She glanced about.

"Only five blocks from home," she said gayly; "and look at that glorious moon!" She smiled shyly up at him. "You—you don't know what you've done for me to-night—Jerry," she said shyly. "You've almost given me back my faith in love."

"Really?"

He took her arm. Happily they walked the five blocks to Corel's modest boarding place. At the door she turned, remembering something.

"You've got to get back to New York," she cried. "I almost forgot. Here!" She fished about in her hand bag until she found a quarter. "Let me lend you this."

He hesitated, then accepted it with a laugh.

"All right! I'm not so keen on walking 'steen miles home at this hour of the night. Where can I return it to you to-morrow?"

"Would you like to come to the hat shop? It's a tiny little place on Forty-

Second Street—the Gloria Anne Hat Shop. That's where I work."

"I'll be there." He smiled at her. "Good night, little sweetheart!"

ALL night long the sound of those words echoed in Corel's ears. They even penetrated the fastnesses of her dreams when she finally got to sleep. "Little sweetheart! Little sweetheart!" She never thought of Laurie at all; but in the morning she thought of him.

In the morning she was the only one on duty in the little hat store. After lunch two other girls came to take care of the afternoon rush, but from nine to twelve Corel was alone. She was awfully glad of that, when Laurie came about ten o'clock.

She looked at him with new eyes. He was too sleek, too self-assured, too spoiled, too prosperous, she decided. Of course he was good-looking; but wasn't he too good-looking? How she had fooled herself! She had fancied herself in love with the things Laurie stood for—wealth, and cars, and good times, and having the other girls envy her; but that wasn't love. That was just a thrill.

"Hello, Laurie!" she said composedly.

He looked as if he hadn't slept so well. His eyes were heavy, and she could tell that he had been drinking.

"I'm in the devil of a fix, Corel," he said, not looking at her at all. "Claire—that is, Miss Marrian—won't believe that—that we—she won't get it through her head that I wasn't in—"

He stopped and ran his finger around the inside of his collar. Corel almost felt sorry for him.

"Your fiancée won't believe that I was merely your now-and-then girl—is that it?" she asked crisply.

"Yes, that's it," replied Laurie in obvious relief. "You're a peach to take it this way, Corel. I—I thought maybe you'd—"

Again he came to a dead stop.

"I don't care at all," said Corel, and as she spoke she knew it was the truth. She hugged the comforting thought of Jerry close to her breast. "I know you didn't love me the least bit. You just took me around now and then, when your fiancée was away. There was no harm in that, but you shouldn't have kissed me and told me you cared for me. It would have been too bad for me, if I had really liked you; but I didn't, you see."

Laurie didn't look so much pleased at that. It was evident that his self-conceit didn't relish the idea that any one could resist falling in love with him—especially some one whom he had deliberately set out to dazzle. To be sure, Corel had always been rather a stand-offish girl, but he thought that it was merely because she was so young and unversed in the ways of the world.

"Claire's coming here to see you," he said sulkily. "She insisted on it. She wants to hear from your own lips how little there was to our flirtation. Will you give her this?" He dropped into Corel's hand the gorgeous ring that she had seen the night before. "Make her wear this ring again, will you?"

COREL was staring at it with big eyes. Such a heavenly ring! A huge, sparkling diamond, banked by tiny ones, and with a pure green emerald on each side. Who could resist such a costly and beautiful thing? She sighed.

"I'll give it to her," she promised.

"Thanks! You're a peach," said Laurie. He turned to go and then

came back. "I really did like you a lot," he said frankly. "If Claire hadn't existed, I might have loved you. I—I'm sorry I pretended to care more than I did."

"That's all right," said Corel.

She thought she saw some one coming—some one with black hair and gray eyes. Her heart bounded joyously.

"Oh, the theater tickets for tonight!" She recollected them just as Laurie was at the door. "Wait a minute, and I'll get them."

He shook his head.

"You use the tickets. It's little enough in return for all you're doing for me."

She waited for Jerry to come in. The diamond and emerald ring—she must put it away where it would be safe. Her purse would be the best place. Thrusting the ring into it, she laid it in the back of the store, near the cash register.

Then she returned to the front of the narrow little shop and looked out of the door. Jerry's smiling face greeted her.

"I've been walking back and forth and forth and back," he said gayly, "until the cop at the corner has begun to regard me with a jaundiced eye; but I wasn't coming in while our friend Wells was holding forth."

Corel put forth an eager hand, and he closed his fingers over hers in a grip that made her wince.

"Laurie wants me to fix it up for him with his fiancée. She's jealous of me, you see. As if she needed to be" —Corel's laugh rippled out—"when I —I care for some one else!"

She kept her gaze steadily fixed on a gay little red hat with a silver buckle.

"You mean that? You really do care a little for me?"

Jerry's voice was jubilant. He took both her hands in his.

To still the excited feeling of panic that swept over her, Corel began chattering about the first thing that came into her mind.

"He gave me his fiancée's engagement ring to give back to her. It's the most gorgeous thing! I never saw anything more wonderful! Just see!"

She slipped her hands from his grasp and went to the back of the store to fetch the ring.

"Gosh!" Jerry sighed. "That's sure a bird of a ring. Cost about four or five thousand dollars, I should imagine. Just think what we could do with all that money, Corel!" He sighed, then laughed. "I'm looking for a new job this morning, Corel. I've got to be worthy of you. I can't be a—a blacking licker any longer."

"A what?"

"Fellow that licks blacking off shoes," Jerry explained, grinning. "I'm going out gunning for a regular job. I'll bet I get it, too!" He gave the ring back to her. "If I had that much money, we'd get married this morning." Corel thrilled. "That is, providing you'd have me," he amended hastily. "As it is, I'll have to wait a few months before I can pop the fatal question."

"Oh, I won't mind waiting a few months," said Corel earnestly.

Then, suddenly, she realized what she had said, and a warm tide of red swept over her face; but Jerry was kissing her—kissing her eyelids, her cheeks, her turned-up nose, her firm little chin, and finally her sweet, warm lips.

"Jiminy, you're wonderful!" said Jerry.

"I beg your pardon!" said a voice.

Jerry and Corel separated hastily,

and Corel began fixing her hair with the immemorial gesture of women who are beloved. Claire Marrian stood in the doorway, gazing around the shop with obvious disgust.

"Wait at the back of the shop, will you, dear?" said Corel in an undertone.

Jerry nodded to show that he understood.

WHEN Jerry was out of earshot, Claire Marrian faced Corel.

"Laurie insisted on my coming here. It's the most absurd thing I ever heard of!"

Claire's dark eyes were hot with fury. Corel knew that she had unwittingly made an enemy for life.

"Laurie—Mr. Wells, that is—wanted me to tell you—" Corel hesitated. This was more difficult than she had anticipated. "Laurie wasn't a bit in love with me, Miss Marrian," she said, beginning anew. "He just took me out because he was lonely when you were away. There was nothing to it at all. The reason he took me to Miss Cleavering's party was because I'd never been anywhere so grand, and—and he was just being kind."

"Do you expect me to believe that you didn't scheme to make him fall in love with you and marry you?"

"I certainly do!" Corel drew herself up to her full height. "I'm already engaged to somebody else."

She looked toward Jerry as she spoke. Claire followed the line of Corel's gaze, and her eyes narrowed cunningly.

"Ah, yes, I see!" she murmured.

"Laurie said you wouldn't take his engagement ring back and he left it here for me to give to you. It's in my purse. I'll get it."

Just then two customers came in and demanded to be waited upon immediately.

"I'll wait," said Claire.

Jerry took one look at the invading women, and reached quickly for his hat.

"I'll be in about five," he said in an undertone, as he went out. "Too many ladies all at once for me right now."

He hurried from the shop. Corel waited on the fussy women in a daze. While she was still busy with them, a couple of giggling schoolgirls entered and began trying on every hat in the shop. The little place seemed crowded with people.

Corel hurried to the best of her ability. She was anxious to give Claire her ring and be through with the whole sorry business; but the selection of a hat is a serious matter, and no woman is to be hurried. The two schoolgirls giggled their way out after a while, and the two other women bought a hat apiece and departed.

Corel went back to the disdainful Miss Marrian. Her cheeks were flushed and her hands shook. This continued excitement was almost too much.

"And now my ring, if you please," said Claire, her voice like ice.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," apologized Corel.

Going over to the cash register, she looked—and looked again. A tight band of fear seemed to be closing about her heart. Her purse wasn't there!

Frantically she began to search. It might have fallen to the floor. It might be under one of the hats. It might be behind the cash register; but it wasn't in any of those places.

"I hope you haven't misplaced your purse, Miss Bayne!"

Miss Marrian's voice was like little trickles of icy water falling in the fevered havoc of Corel's mind.

"No! No! Of course not," she denied.

She went on looking; but after she had searched over the entire shop, she had to face the other girl's rage.

She turned.

"It's gone," she said in a dull, horrible tone. "My purse is gone. Some one must have taken it while I was busy with the customers."

"You must think I'm a trusting soul!" Miss Marrian got up and wrapped her luxurious fox fur more securely about her white throat. She looked at Corel as if that luckless individual was some crawling caterpiller. "Either you find that ring by to-morrow morning," she said, "or I will hand you over to the police. I should report you immediately, but I will be kinder than you deserve. I will give you a day."

Corel pressed a hot hand to her throbbing head.

"There were two theater tickets in my bag," she babbled incoherently. "They were for 'Gypsy Love.' The tickets were for to-night, Aisle G, Nos. 6 and 8. I'm sure that was it. Maybe the person who finds my bag will use those tickets. Then I can trap her, and so get your ring back!"

"H-m-m!"

Claire looked at her with strangely speculative eyes. Then she swept out of the store, leaving Corel crushed and broken.

ALL day long Corel mechanically waited on people. Twice she went out to telephone. The first time she endeavored to reach Jerry. If she could only find him and tell him the whole story! But at Mr. Cleaverings office they told her that Mr. Kingdon had severed his connection with their firm and had left on short notice. They couldn't say where he had gone, nor could they give her his home address; so she had to be content to wait until five o'clock, when he had said he would come back to the shop.

The other call was to the theater. She explained matters to the manager, and asked him to hold any one who attempted to redeem those tickets at the box office. He proved quite sympathetic, and said that if she would ask for him in the evening, he would go with her into the theater and see if G 6 and 8 were occupied.

That was all she could do. She went back and sold hats at two dollars and ninety-five cents apiece until her mind whirled and her feet and hands were like tired lumps of clay. Would five o'clock never come? She was so anxious to see Jerry. Dear Jerry! In the midst of this fearful dilemma he loomed like a bulwark of strength to her.

The afternoon dragged to a close at last. Five o'clock came and went—no Jerry. Half past five—six—still no Jerry.

A horrible fear, as yet undefined, began to stir in Corel's mind. After all, what did she know about Jerry? She had met him at Mona Cleavering's sumptuous apartment. He didn't belong there—he himself admitted that; and yet he was there. He had left his place of business, and hadn't told where he was going. He had said that five thousand dollars meant a fortune to him.

Corel put out a shaking hand as if to ward off something terrible that was menacing her.

"No, no!" she said aloud. "Oh, no!"

One of the other salesgirls patted her hand.

"This is just awful," she said, the satisfaction of being in the midst of excitement shining in her faded blue eyes. "You'd better go out and get some dinner, Corel. Then you'll feel better about the whole thing."

Corel shook her head.

"I don't want anything to eat," she replied dully. "You go, Lily Mae; but be sure to be back by eight o'clock. I want to be early at the theater."

"Yes, sure," promised Lily Mae; and, chewing her gum nonchalantly, she reluctantly made her way out of the store.

Corel settled down to waiting for Jerry. He would come—of course he would come! He was just delayed. That was all—just delayed. Something might have happened. He might have got caught in a subway tie-up; or he might have gone to—to Newark or some place, looking for a job.

Corel began to pace up and down the narrow confines of the little shop. The very hats, suspended on pegs, seemed to leer at her.

"Jerry took that ring! Jerry took that ring!" they seemed to say.

But Corel wouldn't listen. She paced faster than ever. She wouldn't give up hope.

AT eight o'clock Lily Mae came back, avid-eyed for further tidbits of news.

"Hear anything?" she questioned, as she shifted her gum from the northwest to the southwest corner of her mouth.

"Nothing!"

Corel was pulling on her shabby coat and jerking a two-dollar-and-ninety-five-cent hat over her golden curls. Her face was white and strained; but she didn't even look at her reflection in the mirror. She hurried along in the clamor of Sixth Avenue, unheeding. The elevated thundered overhead, the cars roared and honked, but Corel was oblivious. She hastened along, never slackening her pace, until she came to the theater. Her lips moved a trifle.

"God, don't let it be Jerry!" she was saying over and over in a forlorn little prayer of lost hope.

There were crowds of fashionably dressed people surging into the theater. Taxis were blocking the street. Drivers shrieked anathemas at one another. People were chattering and laughing, amid a rustle of silks and a flurry of anticipation. Corel walked unheeding through the very midst of all the excitement. She made her way to the box office and asked to see the manager.

After some delay, he came out. He was a kindly man with daughters of Corel's age at home. After a glance at the girl's paper-white face, he said:

"If you'll come inside?"

His voice was very gentle. When they were inside the theater, he spoke again.

"Nearly every seat is occupied. One of those you mentioned over the telephone is being used. I wonder if you are absolutely certain that G 6 and 8 are the ones! It would be terrible if you made a mistake."

Corel opened her mouth to say that she was positive that those were the seats; but she had been looking down the closely filled rows near the front of the house, and she had seen something that made her heart thud sickeningly. On the aisle was a sleek, dark head.

"Is that G?" she asked in a queer voice that she did not recognize as her own. "Seventh from the front?"

"Yes," said the manager; "and that is No. 6, right on the aisle."

Everything whirled dizzily about Corel—the people milling about, the rustle of programs, the stuffy smell of the theater. Jerry had taken the purse! Jerry was a thief! She had only to say the word, and he would be in the hands of the police for questioning. Jerry was sitting in seat G 6!

But she loved Jerry!

She heard something else echoing in her ears as plainly as if he had been speaking right then. "True love does exist—the love that sacrifices and believes, and doesn't demand."

She turned to the manager.

"I'm sorry," she said. "After all, I'm not quite sure about the seat number; so I can't make any fuss. I'm sorry I troubled you."

Blindly she turned and began elbowing herself out of the theater. Miss Marrian would put her in prison tomorrow; but did it matter? She had saved Jerry!

"Hello, Corel!"

She turned as if some one had struck her. It was Laurie—and with him was Claire, sumptuous in a wrap of ermine with purple orchids pinned to the deep collar.

Corel stared. She swayed. It wasn't the beauty of the coat that held her startled gaze—it was Claire Marrian's left hand. She was holding her wrap together at the neck. On her slender white hand gleamed and glittered a gorgeous ring—a huge diamond flanked by smaller stones, with a flawless emerald standing guard on either side—*the* ring!

"Oh!" said Corel.

Claire's face grew white. She fumbled about in her purse.

"Here is your ticket," she said, and her tone was fraught with meaning.

Corel sensed that she was terrified lest Laurie might learn the full story.

Corel understood everything now. Claire Marrian, overcome by jealous rage, had taken the purse herself; and then she had tried to break up Corel's love affair by giving the ticket to Jerry. Why, Jerry wasn't a thief, after all! Jerry was worthy! Jerry was wonderful!

Laurie smiled.

"Everything is marvelous," he said. "Claire and I are getting married next week. I thank you for making her take her ring back."

Claire Marrian watched Corel like a hawk. Corel interpreted her expression aright. Her eyes were saying to the other girl:

"Don't give me away. I deserve it, I know; but I was horribly jealous of you!"

Corel held out her hand.

"You have my ticket?" was all she said.

When she sat down beside Jerry, he beamed delightedly at her.

"I thought you were never coming," he said. "It was peachy of you to send this ticket up to Cleavering's. It came just before I left." He caught her hand tight in his and snuggled it against his side. "It was mean of you, though, to send me that note, telling me not to come to the store or call for you. How come?"

So that was why he hadn't come! Corel sighed contentedly and nestled close.

"I won't do it again," she promised.

Her heart was beating a wild song of joy. Everything was marvelous! Jerry loved her—Claire Marrian had her ring—Corel wouldn't have to go to jail. What a wonderful world this was!

"I've got a job already," Jerry was

saying joyously. "A real job this time, in an engineering office. In time I can be a civil engineer—what I've always wanted to be."

"I think it would be awfully nice to be an engineer's wife!" said Corel primly.

Jerry squeezed her hand so hard that her fingers felt numb; but she didn't care.

"I'll be your always girl, won't I, Jerry?" she whispered, just as the curtain went up.

"*And how!*" said Jerry inelegantly, but most satisfyingly.

Corel felt happy enough to purr.

The Call

AND I know not now how your call may come,
When the calm tides flow, when the tempests break—
I only know that in you there is some
Strange deep wisdom that I must take
And make my own, before stars fling down
A last thought of light on the dreaming town.

I only know that when I am there,
Taking your lips and your hands for my own,
Lost in the veil of your gleaming hair,
Blind to all else but the light that has shown
In your blue eyes for no other but me—
Love is something to feel and see;

I only know that your call is the clear
Wind through the trees and making them one,
Binding my throat with your hair—ah, my dear,
Your call means again that Life has begun!

—*Peter A. Lea*

Philip did not flinch, she noted. How brave he was!

Heaven, Unlimited

Gold of dreams or gold of dollars? Marjolie thought she could buy anything she wanted

By Penelope Russ

"SO this is Seville," Marjolie Ames murmured, smiling vaguely at the young man opposite. Spanish guitars strummed in her entranced young ears, and before her startled eyes a *gitana* danced an Andalusian dance.

Her amber eyes, her vivid, provocative lips, were disturbingly pretty when she smiled. But Philip Farr stared back at her coldly.

She represented everything he disapproved of in a girl. She was, he told himself, arrogant, spoiled, vain and shallow. She was the daughter of J. Wadsworth Ames, who had made his millions in steel, and who had encouraged his daughter in the conviction that the world was a gilt ball, to buy, to toss about, to discard, at a moment's mood. That she had managed to go through quite a few moods in her nineteen vivid, flippant years, was evident to her companion.

All to-day—at her father's request—he had politely trudged through the museums and edifices of Seville with her. She had been equally unimpressed by it all.

"Much taller buildings," she had murmured, absently flecking her absurdly pretty nose with expensive powder, "in New York. Any good shows in town this week?"

Stiffly, Philip Farr pushed away the glass of *manzanilla* the waiter had brought. "Shall we go back, Miss Ames?" he suggested, coldly. "It's getting late, and I believe your father's waiting for you at the hotel."

"It's not late. It's early," said Marjolie Ames sweetly, in her husky voice that so many men had found enchanting. "I don't want to go back yet. I like this."

"Like what?" he questioned.

"Being with you," she answered, surprisingly.

She cupped her chin in her hands and stared at him speculatively. Her life in New York—boarding school, matinées, football games, sparkling dances, casual young men in raccoon coats sending her an orchid and begging her to wear their fraternity pins—had not prepared her for this tall, serious creature called Philip Farr, who had lived here in Seville the last two years—according to her father—collecting material for a Life of Christopher Columbus, and burying himself in the local libraries. He had furnished her with a new sensation. He was charmingly indifferent to anything she did.

"Why don't you like me?" she asked, frankly, widening her amber eyes at him. "Most men do. I can be rather nice—if you'd take the trouble to find out."

"To-morrow," said Philip Farr, uncomfortably, "we'll visit the Maria Luisa Park and the Tower of Hercules. There is a tobacco factory in which they say Bizet's Carmen worked. We will also see the House of Pilate and the tomb of Christopher Columbus."

"Most men like me," said Marjolie Ames, toying with a bit of sweet cake wistfully.

"He died at Valladolid, Spain," said Philip Farr, stiffly. "His ashes were taken to Santo Domingo and buried there under the major altar of the cathedral. He was—"

"Who?" said Marjolie, absently.

"Christopher Columbus."

"Oh," said Marjolie.

"I don't like women," Philip Farr said, selecting a spiced olive savagely. "They are a deceitful lot. I had an experience once—"

"Was she pretty?"

"She looked like you."

"What—what did she do to you?"

"I do not care to discuss it."

Her name had been Alice. She had left him—practically at the altar—to run off with the third son of a millionaire, and he was still bitter about it. Two years had almost obliterated the unfortunate memory of her. But he was still wary, and he would not—he told himself, staring coldly at the alluring creature opposite who looked so much like his unworthy Alice—be trapped again.

"Come," he said, shortly. "We must be off."

BUT before he could rise, there was a stir of excitement in the crowded café. The music stopped; the *gitana* ceased dancing. Several people rose, craning their necks. Marjolie turned to see a strange figure in the doorway—a tall man, with bright cloak flung arrogantly over his swaggering shoulders, and a livid scar across his right cheek.

"Who in the world is he?" she asked.

"How in the world should I know?" returned Philip.

The Spanish waiter, who was clearing the table, overheard. "The *señorita* wishes to know who the stranger is?" he murmured suavely, hoping, no doubt, for a few *pesetas* for his infor-

mation. "It is El Ufando—the proud. *Muy rico*—very rich! He is from Triana, across the Guadalquivir; he is a gypsy. Last year he won the grand prize in the lottery. But the scar on his cheek—ah, there is a story! It seems, *señorita*—"

The waiter stopped. To Marjolie's surprise, he grew white. His eyes distended, he mumbled something in his throat, and, turning, fled precipitately, upsetting a tray of glasses in his flight.

Startled, Marjolie turned. Behind her chair she saw the dark, smiling face of the scarred fellow the waiter had called El Ufando.

"The *señorita,*" drawled El Ufando, "wished to hear the story of El Ufando's scar?"

"Why not?" murmured Marjolie, enjoying herself hugely.

"Come," said Philip, anxiously. "Let's get out of here."

"I will tell the *señorita* the story of the scar," said El Ufando, sweeping off his sombrero with a flourish. "Some day, I will tell. But not now. Perhaps I take a glass of *manzanilla* now with the *señorita?*"

"Certainly not," said Philip.

The dark fellow stared at him for a moment, with a dangerous look in his eyes. "I do not talk with the *señor,*" he murmured, with ominous softness in his voice, "I talk weeth the *señorita.* The *señorita*—" he lapsed into Spanish suddenly, "who has the eyes of amber wine, and the yellow hair of the flowers that bloom in spring on the hillsides of Santa Maria del Rondo. We shall meet again, *señorita,* and some day soon. El Ufando promises."

"What's he saying?" questioned Marjolie, gazing fascinated at the scar on the stranger's cheek.

"He's selling bananas," said Philip shortly. "We're late, Miss Ames. I do not wish to keep your father waiting."

With a regretful sigh Marjolie stood up. But the episode was not yet ended. For the gypsy called El Ufando suddenly intercepted Philip.

"I do not sell the bananas," he said, his black eyes blazing. "I tell the *senorita* she is beautiful as spring flowers. For that you tell her I sell bananas I should keel you." His hand reached for the hilt of a knife at his belt. "I should keel you weeth thees knife."

Philip Farr had no knife. His eyes did not swerve. His well-bred nostrils curled scornfully.

"Don't be a fool, gypsy," he said, coldly. "Come, Marjolie."

"YOU'RE rather brave," said Marjolie, looking at him from under her long lashes as they rode back through the crowded streets to the hotel.

"Rot!"

"I thought he was frightfully handsome," she murmured dreamily, stealing another sidelong glance at his face to watch the effect of her words. "The gypsy, I mean. I wonder how he really got that scar? I've the oddest feeling that I'll see him again soon. Thank you, Mr. Farr, for an exciting afternoon."

"Don't mention it," said Philip, coldly.

At the entrance of the Hotel Alfonso he left her.

"You'll come to-morrow?" she murmured.

"I believe that is the arrangement."

Her hand touched his with a brief pressure. All at once they were staring into each other's eyes. A moment passed. Two moments. Something went singing through her veins. She found herself oddly breathless:

"At two o'clock, then?" she almost whispered.

"Yes. Good-by," said Philip Farr, wrenching his eyes away.

He began to walk away with swift strides, almost as though he were running from something. Suddenly he felt bewildered, ill, and not brave at all. For the first time in his twenty-five years he was thoroughly afraid. He was afraid that he was going to fall in love with Marjolie Ames and it drove him furious.

"Soulless creature," he muttered savagely, trying to forget the sweet, dizzying bliss of her eyes staring into his.

SHE was waiting for him at two o'clock the next afternoon in the colorful lobby of the big hotel. They drove through the gay, noisy, picturesque streets. Street vendors sang their wares—olives, figs, oranges, flowers. Donkey carts brushed the side of the Hispano-Suiza her father had chartered, and dark-eyed women stared at them from behind iron-grilled windows. Philip talked stiffly of the Tower of Hercules and the tomb of Columbus in a desperate effort to avoid looking into her eyes.

She sat at his side, outrageously pretty in a fetching little green frock, with an expensive fox scarf flung carelessly over one exquisite shoulder and a hat the shade of wood violets deepening the amber lights in her willful eyes.

By four o'clock they had completed the scheduled sightseeing. She dismissed the car, and expressed a wish to walk back. They loitered in the Street of the Serpents, staring into the windows of antique shops.

Marjolie stopped before a particularly pretty vase. "Look," she murmured. "It's perfect, isn't it?"

It was a curious and lovely amber color, and before he could stop he heard himself reply:

"It's just the color of your eyes."

"Oh," she cried, "then I must have it." But before she could turn, a hand reached into the show case and withdrew the amber vase before her eyes.

"Hurry," she said, "they mustn't sell it to any one else. Come—I'm going to buy it!"

Behind the counter a round shouldered little man, with an enormous beard and trusting eyes, was handing the amber vase to a stout Englishwoman who was appraising it.

"Five hundred dollars?" the Englishwoman was remarking. "Far too much for a vase like that. Still, it's Byzantium, isn't it? I think I shall take it, after all."

And she opened her tweed purse.

"Just a moment," interrupted Marjolie, with deceiving sweetness that belied her determined eyes. "May I see the vase?"

The shopkeeper handed it to her. "I'll give you seven hundred for it," she said, smiling again, and still sweetly, at the disgruntled Englishwoman.

"But I especially wanted that vase," the woman said, haughtily, staring at Marjolie with her lorgnette. "It matches my Goya—at the Essex estate."

"Sorry," smiled Marjolie. "It matches my eyes." She opened her purse.

Lifting her chin, the Englishwoman left the shop. Philip, who had stood quietly in the background, looked at Marjolie with inscrutable eyes.

"You think," he said, a trifle bitterly, "that money can buy anything, don't you?"

"Can't it?" smiled Marjolie, hold-

ing up the amber vase admiringly to watch it catch the afternoon sunlight. "It buys me amber vases and pretty frocks and exciting adventures in places like Seville. It buys me trips to Paris and just about anything else my little heart desires."

"What you paid for that vase," said Philip, "represents one-fourth of my yearly income."

"My father made three million last year. He expects to double it this year," murmured Marjolie absently, still studying the amber vase.

Philip was silent.

She put the vase on the counter, touching it lovingly. "Do you really think it matches my eyes?" she murmured dreamily.

Still Philip was silent.

She turned to him suddenly. "Why don't you like me, Mr. Farr? I'm really not so bad. I—I'm kind to beggars. Why do you look at me like that? Is it because I insisted on buying this vase from that woman? But I really wanted it more than she did. Didn't you say it matched my eyes?"

"You deliberately took it away from her," said Philip shortly, looking about the shop in a vain effort to avoid meeting her eyes.

"So you think I'm selfish? Well, I'll show you, then!" She seized the vase suddenly and took a step forward. "I'll—*oh!*"

SHE had stumbled. The amber vase for which she had just paid seven hundred dollars, and which Philip had said matched her eyes, lay in shattered bits on the floor!

"You didn't have to smash it," said Philip bitterly. "There's no sense in putting on the spoiled-child act. It doesn't get over with me."

"Smash it?" she stared at him, two bright spots of color in her cheeks, her eyes dangerously bright with unshed tears. She had had no intention of smashing the vase; she had meant to run out and recall the Englishwoman, to present her with the vase, and to be rewarded with a melting smile from the stern young man who was now accusing her of an unbelievably childish action.

But before she could say a word some one entered the shop. It was a young Spanish boy, a native. He addressed Philip in Spanish, handing him a note.

Philip opened the square of paper. Suddenly he turned pale.

"I must go at once," he said, hurriedly. "I've had important news. It's a—a gentleman I must see at once. Wait here for me while I order a carriage to take you back to the hotel."

He laid the note on the counter and hurriedly left the shop. Marjolie stared down. One corner of the note was open. Before she realized what she was doing she had read three words:

...Dolores is waiting...

That was all, but it sent a shock of dismay into her heart. Who was Dolores? She leaned over to see if she could read the rest of the note.

"I beg the *señorita's* pardon!" A voice broke into her thoughts, startling her so that she wheeled around, almost breathless.

"Oh!" she gasped. The gypsy called El Ufando stood before her. He swept off his sombrero and bowed, with a smiling flash of white teeth in his dark, fascinating, scarred face.

"We meet again, *señorita*, as I have promised."

She stared at him curiously. "How did you know I was here?"

"I have followed the *señorita*, who is beautiful as the spring flowers on the slopes of Santa Maria del Rondo," began El Ufando, staring at her with his burning eyes. "I have looked once into her eyes like amber wine and I have been weary with thirst to look again. Will the *señorita* grant me but a moment—"

He paused at the sound of Philip Farr's voice. "Miss Ames," Philip said, still visibly agitated, "your carriage is waiting." Suddenly he saw the gypsy. "Has this fellow been annoying you?"

She lifted her head, smiling forlornly. "Annoying me? No, he amuses me," she murmured, trying to laugh. "Funny, isn't it? He probably has dozens of dark-eyed *señoritas* dying of love for him—and he leaves them all to follow a girl like me because I don't give a darn for him. But that's life, isn't it? I'm just finding out that the things you really want are sometimes hard to get."

"And sometimes impossible to get," said Philip shortly.

"Do you think Dolores is a pretty name?" murmured Marjolie, looking up into Philip's eyes.

He started. "Come," he said, hurriedly. "I am late now for my appointment."

"With the gentleman friend," she said. "Yes, I know. But I'll see you at the dance to-morrow night? They're having a *fiesta*, and I'm going to wear a golden dress and a lace *mantilla*. You will come, Mr. Farr? You'll promise?"

"Yes," said Philip.

MARJOLIE'S father was waiting for her in their expensive suite.

"Have a nice time, kitten?" he murmured indulgently from behind his paper.

She tossed off her fox fur, flung her hat into one corner of the divan and sank down into the rich cushions with a little sigh.

"I've had adventures. Assorted ones," she answered, drawing off her gloves.

"You usually do."

"Father," she murmured, "what do you do when a young man is polite to you?"

"Give him a gold star and promote him to the head of the department," returned her father. "I approve of politeness. It's a quality altogether too lacking in our young moderns, I've noticed."

"Father," said Marjolie, "I'm not really such a bad sort, am I? I'm willful and I've a mind of my own, and you've brought me up to the notion of life on a silver platter handed out to me, but I have my points, don't you agree? I'm not dishonest, and I don't cheat, even in affairs of the heart, and I've always tried to look life in the face. Is there any reason why a polite young man shouldn't fall in love with me?"

"Are you by any chance referring to Philip Farr?"

She nodded.

"Marjolie," said her father. "I've tried to give you everything. You're like your mother. Perhaps I've spoiled you, but I don't think so. I didn't have a chance to give your mother much, you know. She died when you were three—back in Oklahoma, before I struck it rich. We lived in a three-room shack and she did all her own washing. I've seen her scrub floors. That's why you've got to have the best of everything. I'm a sentimental old man, but I have a feeling that what I'm giving you, I'm giving your mother. If you want Philip Farr I'll get him for you."

"Do you think you can?" she queried, not too hopefully.

"You can do anything," said her father, "with a million dollars."

But there was one more question she wanted to ask:

"Father—"

"Yes, Marjolie?"

"Do you think Dolores is a prettier name than Marjolie?"

Her father smiled. "Your mother's name was Marjolie."

HER costume for the *fiesta* came the next morning. She tried it on before the mirror, staring at her image, thinking, "This is how I will look to Philip to-night." Suddenly she turned her eyes away, feeling almost frightened. She was surprised to see tears on her cheeks. She touched them with startled finger tips.

She had always rather imagined that love, when it came, would be a gay thing you could smile about. But this desolate and profound emotion, winging swift as an arrow through her heart, bewildered her. "Mrs. Philip Farr," she said, suddenly, out loud, and was surprised to see her cheeks flush crimson, and to feel her hands tremble.

"I want only vengeance upon girls like you"

But you could buy anything, her father had assured her, with a million dollars. She looked at the clock. Not one yet. It would be hours and hours before she would see Philip. How could she wait until eight o'clock that evening? Suddenly she had a plan; Philip had said something to her day before yesterday about showing her a rare manuscript he had copied from the Indian Archives. She would surprise him by calling to-day.

She ordered the car and rode through the crowded streets, aware to her finger tips of a bright bliss at the prospect of seeing him. He lived in the Street of the Sweetheart of the River; she alighted from the car, told the

chauffeur to wait, and ascended the stone steps.

At the top door she knocked. There was no answer. She knocked again. Then, as the door was ajar, she entered. Her eyes swept the low-ceilinged room. On the mantel there was an enlarged photograph of Philip in a silver frame, Philip holding a tennis racket and smiling unguardedly at her as he had never smiled in life.

"Philip?" she called softly.

Suddenly she stood still, startled. There was a sound of voices in the other room. "Has the Señor Philip come yet?" a woman's voice asked. "*Dios mio*, not yet," replied another voice, a low, laughing, throaty voice. "But he will come any moment now. He knows that I am waiting. Ah, Maria, is it not too wonderful, thees thing one call love, yes? We but wait for one thing, then we sail for Paris. And to-day the Señor Philip has promised . . ." Her words were lost in a blur of indistinguishable Spanish.

Marjolie felt her heart turn to ice. She tiptoed to the alcove and looked in.

Sitting on the carved bed was a girl with a cloud of dark curls, slanting, slumbrous eyes and lips like poppies. There were dangling earrings against her olive cheeks, and at her throat and wrists were rows of jangling bracelets. She was half-clad; her shoulders were bare, and about her she had draped the shimmering folds of a scarlet shawl. There was a heavy scent of perfume in the room, and lying on the carved chest, at the foot of the bed, Marjolie's stricken eyes saw the coat that Philip had worn the day before!

"Oh—" she uttered a low cry. The girl on the bed wheeled about, springing up with a startled sound. The two women stared at each other. From below there came another voice. "You have called me, Dolores? I come in a moment."

"You—you're Dolores?" gasped Marjolie.

The girl shrank back on the bed, crying something in Spanish. Marjolie did not wait. She turned, with cheeks as white as death, and went running out of Philip's rooms.

Somehow, she got back to the hotel and locked herself in her room. But she couldn't cry. She was beyond tears. Lying on the bed, where the maid had placed it, was the gold dress she had tried on so gayly that morning. She was afraid to look at it. "I hate him! I hate him!" she cried, with tearless sobs. She flung herself down on the chaise longue, trying to forget his voice, telling her her eyes were the color of amber . . .

Suddenly she was conscious of people in the next room. She heard her father's voice:

"Why of course, Farr, old chap. Glad to oblige."

And then to her surprise Philip's voice; low, troubled, determined.

"I hate to ask for it. But I've got to have it, Mr. Ames. I'll pay every penny back. I swear it. But I must have the five thousand right away—to-day."

She sprang up and crept to the door. Through the panelling she listened. Philip had asked her father for five thousand dollars and her father was going to give it to him. Something sharp turned in her heart; she remembered the girl Dolores crying, "*We wait but for one thing, and then we sail for Paris. And to-day the Señor Philip has promised . . .*" She realized, suddenly the import of the words.

They were only waiting—Philip and the Spanish Dolores—for the five thousand dollars her father—*her father!*—

was about to lend Philip; then they would sail gayly off for Paris.

"Just a moment," she heard her father say. "I'll get my checkbook."

SHE wrenched the door open; stood framed in the entrance, a small, furious figure with tousled hair and blazing eyes.

"Wait!" she said. "Father, you're not going to give Mr. Farr five thousand dollars."

Philip turned, startled. Her father faced her in surprise.

"Why, Marjolie, what does this mean?" he asked, incredulously.

"Never mind what it means," she stormed fiercely. "You're not to lend Philip Farr five thousand dollars, and that's final. Father, you've never denied a request of mine. You can't deny me now!"

"But only yesterday you told me you were in love—"

"Hush!" her cheeks flamed. "Don't be ridiculous, father. As for you—" She walked swiftly to Philip, standing as though he were carved of stone. "You get out of here, you hear me? I never want to see your face again! Get out at once!" Her small hands were clenched, her cheeks were blazing, but through the angry fire of her eyes there was something frightened and imploring staring out at him, crying in desperation *"Why? Why?"*

She felt her eyes betraying her; she wheeled about and walked over to the window. Tears blurred her vision, but she held her chin high. He shouldn't see her cry! Behind her back she was aware of his voice, stiff and hurt, saying:

"Don't worry, I'm going. I don't know what objection you have to my borrowing the money from your father. I was going to pay every penny back. I suppose this is another whim of yours. You like to make people suffer. Well, after this I'd sooner starve than take one penny from you or any one connected with you. Good afternoon, Miss Ames."

The door closed. He was gone. She sank down in a little sobbing heap.

"I thought you told me," said her father dazedly, "that he was a polite young man? He didn't seem very polite then."

"Please," she sobbed, "leave me. I must be alone. I'll tell you all about it some time, ages and ages from now. Maybe I'll laugh and think it's a good joke on me, but just now I can't talk about it. It—hurts too much."

When she looked up, her father was gone.

Hours passed. Outside the sun sank. Twilight hung blue gauze over the streets of Seville. A handful of early stars glittered near a pale scimitar-shaped moon. But the girl on the divan didn't move.

Then, all at once, she sat upright, rubbing her eyes dazedly. Had she been dreaming, or had something really been thrown through the grilled window? She stared about the room. On the floor near her she saw a single yellow rose.

She stooped to pick it up; there was a note attached to it. Perhaps it was from Philip? With trembling fingers she opened it.

But it wasn't from Philip. She read:

> To-night I shall be at the *fiesta*, at the third pillar of the Crystal Fountain. You will not fail me, Señorita Marjolie? There are things I would say to you. EL UFANDO.

She ran to the balcony. But the patio was deserted. She read the note again. In the other room, the gold

dress and the lace mantilla were hanging. After all, why shouldn't she go? Anything was better than staying here, weeping her eyes out. Perhaps the gypsy would tell her the story of the scar.

Her father looked up in surprise as she entered the room half an hour later, in the shimmering gold costume. She toyed with a scarlet feathered fan, and high over her yellow hair there rose a carved comb and the lace mantilla. Beneath it her young eyes were tragic, but her lips smiled.

"Silly to take things seriously, isn't it, father," she murmured, managing a forlorn little laugh. "Especially in Seville. I'm going to have a gay time tonight. At the *fiesta*."

Her father looked at her sadly. "I'd rather hear you cry—than laugh like that," he said, gently. "Won't you tell me the trouble, Marjolie?"

But she couldn't. She couldn't bear to talk about it—yet. She put on her gold mask and slipped down the marble stairs to the main patio of the hotel, where the costumed *fiesta* was being held.

THERE were lanterns strung from olive trees; gorgeously appareled people moved like figures from a tapestry under the glittering stars. Tinkle of laughter, bright music of guitars, dancing feet, merged in a colorful kaleidoscope. But Marjolie only stared at it all with stricken young eyes.

Suddenly she gave a start. Coming toward her, not in costume, not even masked, was Philip Farr. She felt herself tremble, but she lifted her chin proudly.

"What—what are you doing here?" she demanded, icily.

"I've got to talk with you," said Philip, roughly. His eyes were burning, and his face was very white.

"Didn't I tell you this afternoon I never wanted to see you again?"

Marjolie shrank against a marble column, glad of the mask that hid her eyes.

"What—what do you want?" she murmured in a tremulous voice.

For a moment there was silence; their eyes met and clung. Then Philip was speaking, in a low, bitter voice:

"I'm a fool. But I can't help myself. You've probably had dozens of men in love with you. You're used to breaking hearts. Well—here's mine, if it's any satisfaction to you. You're stupid and shallow and selfish, but it doesn't make any difference. Oh, *Marjolie*—"

Before she could speak he had caught her in his starved arms. She felt his lips burning on hers. For one moment she forgot the world, caught in the surging tides of ecstasy.

"Oh—" She thrust him away, staring up at him with fierce young eyes. "Oh, how *dare* you?" His lips, that not an hour ago had touched Dolores's! She swayed, unsteadily, torn with anger and jealousy at the thought.

But why had Philip Farr changed so suddenly? Yesterday he had been stiff and polite, utterly indifferent to her. What was the reason for his sudden kisses? Was it because he thought that by making love to her she would persuade her father to give him the five thousand dollars?

Suddenly she wanted to hurt Philip. "Don't be a fool, Mr. Farr," she heard herself say, in a high, artificial voice. "And don't for one moment believe I don't see through your pretty plan. But the play acting doesn't get over with me. I realize you're simply trying to persuade me to agree to the five thou-

sand dollar idea. But if you think for one minute I'd let father give you that, so you could go to Paris—"

"Marjolie! Wait!" White-faced, Philip wheeled about. "You can't think —you can't believe—"

"I most certainly can think, and I do believe," she said, still laughing that brazen, heart-breaking laugh. "And I never want to see you again. Oh, go, do you hear me? Go! And you were the man who told me there were things money couldn't buy!"

She turned and ran, tear-blinded, through the thick shrubbery. She didn't know where she was going. Several people turned in surprise at the sight of her slim, flying figure, but she sped on.

Suddenly she stopped. A voice had called from behind an olive tree:

"Señorita Marjolie? You have not forgotten my note . . .?"

El Ufando stood before her, smiling down with a flash of his white teeth.

"Oh—you!"

She looked around. Coming toward her was Philip. "Wait—Marjolie—" Philip called. She turned to the man at her side. "Take me away! Quick!" she gasped. "I don't want to see Philip. I must never see him again!"

FIVE minutes later she was driving with El Ufando through the brilliantly lit streets of Seville, sobbing as though her heart would break.

Once she looked up. "Where are we?" she demanded. But she didn't greatly care. She felt desperate and reckless, as though nothing in the world mattered any more.

"We are crossing the Guadalquivir," said El Ufando. "In a moment we come to Triana."

"Anywhere," sobbed Marjolie. "Just keep on driving. I don't care where we go."

The carriage stopped. She looked at the gypsy in surprise. It was a dingy street, cluttered and dirty. Somewhere a dog howled disconsolately. A guitar strummed plaintively behind a closed window, and the lonely *clop-clop* of a donkey sounded from a distant street.

"I think we'd better go back," said Marjolie, staring around through dazed, tear-blurred eyes.

"Not yet," said El Ufando. "Come."

"Where?"

She was beginning to be frightened. But she managed to lift her chin. After all, this gypsy couldn't harm her. Her father's millions could take care of her. He knew—this gypsy—that her father was rich and influential. He wouldn't dare attempt anything.

"Up these stairs," said the gypsy.

She gave a gasp when the door opened and they stood at last in a long, low-ceilinged room. The dingy exterior of the building had not prepared her for this. Rich tapestries, bronzes, objects of beauty from the world of art, made a confusion of color and beauty. The hangings were of crimson velvet, the rugs thick and finely woven.

"You are surprised, *señorita?*"

"Nothing surprises me any more," she returned, looking about her. "But now I've seen your place, don't you think we'd better be going back?"

"Back?" said El Ufando, staring at her with a queer look in his dark eyes. "But the *señorita* is not going back."

"Don't be a fool," said Marjolie. "Take me home at once."

For answer, the gypsy merely smiled and shook his head.

She considered. "Listen," she said. "Is it money you want? Well, take me back and my father will pay you

well. Take me back at once and I'll give you a thousand dollars."

She was unprepared for the effect of her words. "Money!" the gypsy said, in a low voice filled with scorn. "The *señorita* still thinks money can buy anything? I do not want your money." His eyes burned into hers.

She was frightened. She tried to laugh: "I suppose you'll pull the usual line now about falling in love with me. Well, if you *are* in love with me, it's not—"

"Love!" the gypsy gripped her wrist. "You little fool! You think I love you. Don't you know why I have brought you here? It is no love I have for you and your kind, you Europeans! Look in my eyes. What do you see there?"

Frightened, Marjolie shrank against the wall. Without releasing his grip on her wrist the gypsy went on:

"Listen, and I will tell you the story of the scar! It was inflicted with my own knife! Does that surprise you? Does it surprise you to know I had a sweetheart once—a gypsy of my own blood? She was dark as night and beautiful as dawn, and when El Ufando won the lottery prize, plans were made for a marriage. I went to Granada to complete arrangements, but when I returned the bird had flown. 'She is gone with the American,' they told me. I followed; it was dark; I caught up with them on the banks of the Guadalquivir. In the dark of night we fought. *Madre de Dios,* he was unarmed, but he had the strength of ten, that American devil. My own knife he bent back to scar my face. They left me for dead and ran on. Now I live for revenge. I seek them forever. Little fool! Love! What do you know of love? It is hate, I tell you, hate that burns in my veins. Look, there is her picture, the dark, the lost one. Look well!"

Marjolie, stunned, stared at the painting he indicated. She gave a low cry.

The face was the face of the girl she had seen only this afternoon in the rooms of Philip Farr!

"Her name was Dolores," she heard El Ufando saying.

MARJOLIE turned on the gypsy. "Listen—you still seek your Dolores?"

"Seek her? Do you know where she is?"

"I think I do. If I told you I could lead you to her—"

"*Madre de Dios!* If you joke, I kill you!"

"I am not joking. I saw her only this afternoon. Hurry."

Five minutes later they were riding back through the streets. The scar on the gypsy's cheek was livid, his eyes like coals. "Faster!" he cried. "We must go faster!"

The carriage stopped before Philip's place. Marjolie led El Ufando up the same stairs she had ascended so gayly only that afternoon. At the door to Philip's room, she paused.

She tried the knob softly. It was unlocked. She beckoned to El Ufando. They entered the dark room.

There was the sound of a woman singing in the adjoining room. Marjolie recognized the voice of Dolores. She felt El Ufando stiffen.

"Hurry," she breathed, "you can take her now. The American *señor* is gone. Take her quickly, before the *señor* returns!"

The gypsy stared at her. "Take her?" Again his eyes burned like fiery coals. "I do not come to take Dolores. I come to kill her—and the American

señor! You did not think I take back the faithless one? No! To-night El Ufando is revenged!"

"You're not going to kill Philip?" she cried.

The next moment a hand fastened across her mouth. "Little fool, hush!" said El Ufando. In the stillness she heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. It was Philip, coming home. Aghast, she saw the gypsy's other hand creep to the hilt of his knife.

"To-night," he hissed, "the score is evened. Before I leave this place the insult is scored clean with blood!"

Marjolie tried to scream. She felt her heart turn to ice. Philip was in deadly danger and she could not warn him. Suddenly it did not matter what he did or was; she tried to struggle furiously, but the gypsy's arms were a vise. He tied a gag about her mouth, bound her hands, and flung her softly into a corner.

"I will kill you, too," he breathed, "if you make one sound."

The footsteps on the stairs drew nearer.

The door opened. In the dark she saw a figure enter. Philip! She could not see his face, but her heart gave a great leap. How could she warn him? In another moment El Ufando would rush forward.

She struggled to her feet. "I will kill you too," El Ufando had cried, and she knew that he had meant it. But it didn't matter. With all the strength of her slim body, she flung herself against El Ufando. Vain, shallow, selfish, Philip had called her, but he would not call her that if he could see her now. "Philip," she tried to scream. "Save yourself!" But no words came through the tight gag on her mouth. "Little fool!" hissed El Ufando. "I'll teach you—"

The next moment she felt a strong arm tearing her away; she saw two swaying bodies, heard confused cries. In the darkness, she could only vaguely make out the unequal struggle. The door to the adjoining room opened and framed in the entrance she saw a dark, cloudy-haired figure.

"*Valgame Dios,* what has happened?" called the girl Dolores, crossing herself. She cried something in Spanish; the next moment she had pressed a button and the lights went on.

Marjolie saw the gypsy stagger back. He put his hand to his side, swayed, and with a great groan fell over backward, striking his head on the side of the carved chest. Things went black for a moment.

Then she was aware of some one untying the bonds that held her hands and the gag was taken from her throat.

"Philip—he isn't killed?" she murmured dazedly. She looked around the room. There, on the floor, lay El Ufando. Two of the police, the Guardia Civil, were bending over the body, taking notes. "In self-defense, *señor.* Yes. It is his own knife," one said. The girl Dolores stood weeping and fingering the cross that hung by a gold chain to her neck. "*Valgame Dios,* he is dead. El Efando is dead," she was crying. But the man at her side put his arms around her.

Marjolie couldn't bear to look. It hurt to see Philip holding Dolores close. She tried to shut her ears.

"He did not know," Dolores was saying, "that we have for each other the great love. He did not know that we are what you call the married. Poor El Ufando."

Married? Marjolie advanced unsteadily. "Philip," she began in a shaken voice.

The man at Dolores's side turned.

Marjolie found herself face to face with a total stranger.

"YOU'RE not — Philip?" she gasped.

"Philip? Certainly not." The man stared at her.

"But who are you?"

"I'm Larry Turner," said the man simply. "Why?"

"But—Philip—?"

"He was good enough to let us stay here awhile—Dolores and I. We're married, you know. This gypsy fellow here had sworn to track us down, and I thought it safer to bring Dolóres here. We planned to go to Paris, but unfortunately I had so many debts I couldn't get away. Philip was a brick, though. He promised to advance us five thousand. You see—"

Marjolie did not hear the rest of his words. She sank weakly down on the carved chest.

"Here comes Philip now," added the man.

Philip stared around the room in surprise. "What's going on here?" Swiftly, Larry explained. Philip turned to Marjolie.

"Marjolie," he cried, "you're hurt!"

The tip of El Ufando's knife had grazed her arm. "It's nothing, really," she murmured in a tired little voice. There were blood stains on the gold dress and her lace mantilla was torn to rags.

"She saved my life," Larry Turner was saying. "When this gypsy fellow started to get me, she flung herself against him. He'd gagged and tied her, and threatened to kill her, but still, she did it."

"I thought it was you, Philip," she said, weakly.

"Marjolie," cried Philip, his heart in his eyes.

. . . Then, somehow, they were standing out on the balcony, with a thousand stars winking softly above.

"I'm vain and shallow and stupid," whispered Marjolie. "You said so yourself."

"Forgive me," Philip's voice was muffled.

"No. It's you who should forgive me. I've been such a little fool," she lifted her head and smiled deep into his eyes. "I thought I could buy heaven, you know. But I've found out that money can't buy the best things in life. Things like knowing the man you love loves you, and—"

"And *this*," murmured Philip in a deep voice, being beautifully impolite and kissing her thoroughly.

"Please!" she pleaded. "No more now. I must be alone—to think!"

Miracle of Love

Out of the West came Rola's sweetheart—only to place loyalty to his pal above his heart's desire!

By Edna Ettinger

ROLA ERDWAY, who had been on the stage for more than twelve of her twenty years, never knew what "stage fright" meant until she looked up into the glowing brown eyes of a tall young man who was being introduced to her as Ralph Hartland. A moment of swift panic, then came the feeling that a leaping flame had touched her—vitalized every part of her being.

The hostess had passed on to other guests. For the few seconds that seemed a lifetime, Rola, unable to speak for the quivering of her heart, could only gaze steadily into those eyes.

Then, "May I sit down?" he asked, breaking the spell that held them both.

With a quick breath she recovered her poise, touched the velvet cushion beside her on the window seat. "Please do," she said, and noticed that her voice, speaking the casual words, sounded unreal and far away.

As he sat down, Rola covered her left hand with her right. She hardly knew what prompted her to slip off her engagement ring and, a moment later, to drop it carelessly into her gold vanity bag.

They spoke of trivial things, but they were studying each other. He was very handsome, Rola thought. Not with the sleek good looks of a matinée idol with trained eyebrows, but with the rugged, virile handsomeness of a two-fisted man—a man of strength, a man who accomplished things.

His face was tanned and his sandy hair was bleached by the sun. Rola watched his mouth as he talked, fascinated by the whiteness of his teeth and the deep color of his lips.

He was broad-shouldered and thin-waisted. His white shirt front bulged because of the deep chest beneath it. And his posture, even when relaxed, was straight and erect.

It was hard for her to guess his age. He couldn't possibly be more than twenty-six or twenty-eight. The power of the man was balanced by his charm. There was a boyishness in his manner that captivated Rola, that brought her close to him, as to a kindred spirit.

In his eyes she was the loveliest girl he had ever seen. A dainty, fragile creature with soft, warm curves. A pretty, oval face framed by black hair that curled in a thousand ringlets. Sparkling black eyes. An adorable mouth that was formed for love.

He was intrigued by the whiteness of her shoulders and the smoothness of her throat, by the gown of old rose that clung to her like an embrace.

ROLA could not continue the trivial conversation. Her mind was filled with a thousand questions—every one of Ralph. Who was he? Where did he come from? And where was he going?

"Do you like this sort of thing?" Rola asked with a little gesture denoting the party.

"I do now," he answered, looking at her meaningly.

"But it's not what you are accustomed to. Tell me, please, what do you do?"

"I'm afraid you won't be interested."

"I'm sure I will."

"I build dams," he informed her, "to reclaim desert land. You see, it's hardly a topic for conversation at a party. I'd rather listen to you. You look so refreshingly cool, you make me forget the blazing sun. And you're so very pretty, you blot out of my mind the arid desert with the cactus, the sagebrush and the lava beds. It is surprising to me"—he glanced at her ringless fingers—"that no man has claimed you yet."

She was sorry he said that. She didn't want to tell him the truth—that she was engaged to John Berwick. Somehow or other, John seemed insignificant compared to this man who was so vitally alive. And yet, John had accomplished things, too. He had amassed a fortune of more than a million dollars. And he was no older than Ralph.

"Well," she parried, "I might say the same of you."

"Thank you," he laughed. "But

I'm afraid I've been away from the social world too long to be found interesting."

"On the contrary. That makes you more interesting."

He looked at her steadily. "Will you let me see you again?" he asked. "I'm going to be in New York for a week."

She hesitated. Again there was a moment of panic in her heart. What was she doing? Why was she leading this man on? She had promised to marry John Berwick within a week. The date was set. She must not become interested in another man now.

She wanted to say no, but her lips refused to frame the word. There was something in his eyes that melted her heart, that spoke of tenderness, worship, love. Those eyes seemed to be telling her that she was the most desirable girl on earth.

"I don't know," she said hesitantly. "But if you'll call me to-morrow I'll tell you."

"Thanks," he replied. "I'll hope for the best."

Rola could not understand herself. She had met thousands of men, but not one of them had ever caused her to lose her heart or her head. She, who had so often portrayed love at first sight on the stage, failed to realize that the miracle was happening in her own life. She was fighting this strange but far from unpleasant sensation. In her mind there was, like a flaming sword, her sense of duty to John Berwick.

SHE liked John, or she would never have promised to marry him. He had made possible her great success. Although he knew nothing about the theatrical game, because he loved her he had backed her in a show, and made her a star. He had helped her attain her ambition, although few of her friends knew anything about him. They had planned their marriage as a surprise to every one.

Rola felt suddenly that she must get away. She wanted to be alone. She must *think*.

"I'm going to leave now," she said, extending her hand to Ralph. "Thank you for a very lovely time."

He rose to his feet. "May I take you home, Miss Erdway?"

"Oh, no," she protested. "The party isn't over."

"As far as I'm concerned," he said frankly, "when you're gone the party is over. I'll get your wrap."

Rola couldn't very well shout across the room to him, so she waited, annoyed, and yet thrilled. Her mind was in confusion. She wanted him to drive her home, and then again she didn't.

He returned with the wrap, a silver brocade trimmed with ermine, a gift from John. He placed it on her shoulders gently, as if he were covering a precious flower.

Rola could not repress a feeling of pride as she sat in the cab beside this man from the West. He was very handsome, and, in the city of pale men, he stood out from his fellows, like a god among ordinary humans.

Presently they were in front of her home.

"Would you care to come up a moment for a cigarette?" she asked.

His eyes brightened. "I'd enjoy that immensely."

The apartment was like Rola. It had distinction. There was a fragrance in the air like that which he had noticed when he helped Rola with her wrap.

He offered her a cigarette, but she shook her head. Lighting one for himself, he sat down in a great armchair.

Rola sat curled in one corner of the couch.

"Do you know," he said, "that not until I went for your wrap did I discover who you were. The hostess told me that you were the star in a musical comedy."

"That's too bad," Rola laughed. "I was trying to keep my secret from you."

"Well, since it's out, you may as well tell me where you're playing. I intend to be one of the audience tomorrow night."

She told him, but changed the subject quickly. Thought of her work reminded her of John. It seemed disloyal to be talking to this man in her apartment, when she would soon be the bride of another.

He got up from his chair and sat down beside her. "I seem so far away there," he offered.

Once more she felt that swift flame touching her. Once more she felt his personality weaving itself around her and shackling her.

He was telling her of the West now—of the battle against nature to reclaim waste land—of the spell of the desert.

"For the last year or so," he said, "I've been restless out there. I've wanted to get back to civilization. My life seemed incomplete. For hours I'd sit in front of my shack smoking my pipe. The night is long and lonesome in the desert. I'd sit and dream of a girl. But I couldn't visualize her. That didn't bother me much. I always felt that when I met her I would recognize her."

Rola paled as she looked at him. Her heart was pounding madly. Nervously she clasped her hands. She ought to stop him. She shouldn't let him say any more. She could not speak.

"To-night," he continued, "I met her. You're the girl, Rola." He took her hands and held them tightly. "You're the girl I dreamed of. You're the girl I want. I've got to have you, and I *will* have you."

She tried to resist him, but she was no match for his strength. There was hunger and adoration in his eyes as he held her in his strong arms and looked down at her. "You've got to love me," he cried out.

Then he pressed his lips to hers and kissed her, kissed her until she relaxed in his arms, her lips quivering against his. Then her arms stole around his neck and she hid her face against his shoulder.

"Oh, Ralph, my dear!" she said. "I didn't understand it when I first met you, but I'm glad now. This is—*must* be—love."

Then, like the pointing finger of conscience, John Berwick came to her mind. A shiver went through her as she drew back from those compelling arms. What had she done? Fallen in love with another man the very week she was to be married!

She went to the foyer and got Ralph's hat and coat. "Please go, now," she said.

He touched her hand. It was cold. "Are you ill, Rola?" he asked.

"No, no," she answered quickly. "I want to be alone. I want to think."

LONG after he left, she lay, a small, pathetic figure, curled up on the couch. One would hardly have believed her the same radiant creature who delighted audiences with her bubbling joyousness.

Ralph had swept her off her feet. He had struck a chord in her heart and awakened emotions of which she had never thought herself capable. There

was no doubt in her mind that she loved him, heart and soul—that she could never be happy without him.

And, now that she understood the miracle of love, she realized how little she cared for John Berwick. She wondered how she had ever agreed to marry him. He had been very kind to her. Everything in the apartment, all her clothes and all her jewels, had come from him. It was he who had made possible the realization of her dream. Finally she understood why she had consented to marry him. It had been gratitude, and not love. But what if he cared for her, as she now loved Ralph? Perhaps, instead of sending Ralph away, she should have told him about John—asked him to advise her.

She awoke late the next morning, and dressed hurriedly to keep an engagement with John. A taxi took her to his apartment, and as she rode up the elevator her mind was still in turmoil.

"You look tired, dear," John commented as he helped her remove her squirrel coat. "Perhaps you're not getting enough rest."

Rola dropped into a chair.

"I've got some great news," John continued. "My best friend has come for the wedding. He got into town yesterday and tried to get in touch with me, but, as you know, I was in Philadelphia. He called me early this morning and I'm expecting him now at any moment.

"You'll like him, Rola. He's the best chap in the world. We went through college together. And we stuck to each other like Damon and Pythias. He's the best friend I ever had. Straight as a die. I'd trust him with everything I've got."

Rola looked at John. She had never seen him so happy and eager. No doubt his friend did constitute an important part of his life. He seemed exceptionally glad that he was coming to the wedding. How *could* she tell him of the new love that had entered her life?

THE doorbell rang suddenly.

"He's here," John cried. He left Rola and went into the other room to admit his friend.

"Well," she heard John's voice, "if it isn't the old horse thief himself, in person!"

"And how's the bloated cattle rustler?" Rola heard a voice that made her tremble.

"Ralph, you homely Turk, I'm glad to see you," John said.

"And I'm glad to see you, you starved Armenian," the friend said. "I just left the old dam flat and came on to bury Cæsar."

"Sh!" John said. "The little girl is inside."

Waves of heat swept over Rola. Her face was scarlet. She had recognized the voice of John's friend immediately. He was Ralph Hartland!

Now they were coming into the room. John was holding Ralph's arm affectionately. Ralph stopped dead when he saw Rola. His face turned gray.

"Isn't she a beauty?" John said proudly. "She bowls every one over who sees her for the first time. Rola, dear, this is Ralph Hartland. I want you two to like each other."

Rola felt Ralph's eyes on her, waiting for her to show her hand. Somehow she managed a smile.

"Ralph and I met last night," she said quietly.

"You did?" John exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, at Mrs. Secor's party. Ralph took me home."

Ralph's face relaxed. Rola felt that by being honest, she had somewhat retrieved herself in his eyes.

"Well, it surely is a small world," John remarked. "Imagine coming a thousand miles to see me and going to a party and meeting my sweetheart. I guess we don't realize how the little threads of life are tangled up. I believe this little old world is worked on a plan. And things that happen are not merely coincidences." He poked Ralph in the ribs. "Say, why don't you shut me up like you used to when I started to philosophize? Remember those days?"

"Yes, I remember," Ralph answered in a toneless voice.

They sat down. John questioned Ralph about his work.

"You ought to give it up," John said. "You ought to come to New York. There's a lot of engineering to be done right here. It's too bad Rola hasn't a sister. That would be ideal—if we were married to two sisters. But—there's only one Rola in the world!"

Rola noticed that Ralph avoided looking at her. And when he did glance in her direction, he never looked into her eyes.

Later John excused himself. "I won't be gone more than half an hour," he said. "It will give you two a chance to get acquainted. When I get back we'll go to lunch."

The room was deathly still when John left. Then Rola turned to Ralph.

"I can imagine what you think of me."

"I'd rather not discuss it," he said.

"We must discuss it," she said. "And I want you to believe me, too. I thought I loved John, and I did intend to marry him. But I can't now."

"Why not?" he glared at her.

"You know why. Because I love you."

He forced a laugh. "Nonsense. Last night—well—that was just a silly flirtation."

"I don't believe you. You're not that type of man. You couldn't pretend that way. You love me, Ralph. In your heart you know you do. And I love you. I never knew the meaning of life until you held me in your arms. I was going to marry John because I didn't know what real love was. I liked him. He bought me pretty things. He made a star of me."

"But you *can't* go back on your word now," he interrupted.

"And I can't go *on* with it, either," she answered. "After last night no man but you can touch me. Oh, Ralph, why don't you try to help me? Can't you see I'm baring my heart for you. It would be *wrong* to marry John—loving you. I'm willing to give up everything—fame, riches, life itself. I'll go away with you. I'll live in the desert with you. I *belong* to you, Ralph. You *must* take me!"

HIS eyes were cold, his lips ashen. "It's too bad you said that. You may regret it in a few months. But I'll try to forget it. You see, it doesn't mean anything to me. I don't love you, Rola. I'm sorry to tell you that, if it really hurts. The things I said last night were just with one idea in mind. I wanted to kiss you, that's all."

"I don't believe you," she broke in.

"Besides," he added, "I would never permit myself to fall in love with you if you were John's girl. His friendship means more to me than anything in the world. He's always stood by me, loyal and true. Whatever I

have in this world I owe to him. When every one else deserted me, John stuck to me. He once nursed me back to life when I was desperately ill. And financially he's never failed me. You who loved her pleading with her to marry another.

"John will be back soon," he ended. "I'm depending upon you not to do or say anything that would hurt him."

"We are married!" she said. Rola fell back

may not understand that feeling of loyalty between us, but as far as I'm concerned, nothing on earth can affect it."

"Then you'd give me up even if you did love me?"

"If I did—yes." Then he spoke of John. Told her what a splendid chap he was. Assured her that she would never regret marrying him. That he would surely make her happy.

Oh, the irony of it all. The man

Two days passed. Rola was miserable. Since they had parted—in John's presence—Ralph had avoided her. And she was hungry for the sight of him. Hungry for the sound of his voice. She thought of him through every waking moment. There was no doubt in her mind that at last she knew real love — consuming, overpowering love.

Finally she could endure it no longer. The thing was sapping her

strength, affecting her work. She must see Ralph. She must tell him that she couldn't go through with the marriage to John. It would mean the ruin of their three lives. John would understand.

She telephoned Ralph's hotel and gave the number of his room.

"Hello." The very sound of his voice sent a quiver through her.

"This is Rola," she said. "Can you come over to see me?"

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm very busy now."

"Then I'm coming to see you," she said firmly.

"I'd rather you didn't."

"I must."

Rola hung up the receiver. Her mind was firmly fixed now. She was sure that Ralph loved her, and that he was giving her up only because of his loyalty to John. But he could not force her to abide by his decision. There was only one thing to do. They must tell John the truth. It wasn't their fault that they'd fallen in love. Hearts cannot be dictated to.

WHEN Rola knocked at the door, Ralph opened it himself. She was about to speak when she noticed a stranger in the room—a very pretty girl with golden hair and soft brown eyes. She was sitting on the couch and looking very much at home.

"I'm sorry," Rola said. "I thought you were alone."

"I intended telling you," he said, "but you hung up rather hastily. Come in."

Rola walked in slowly. Her eyes were fixed on the stranger, and instantly she noticed a gold wedding band on the girl's finger. There was something familiar about that girl, Rola thought. She was sure that she had seen her—somewhere.

Ralph went over to the girl and put a hand on her shoulder. "My dear," he said, "this is Miss Erdway. And this is Mrs. Hartland, Rola. We were married this morning."

The room swam before Rola's eyes. She felt terribly faint and ill. Had Ralph struck her in the face he could not have stunned her more completely.

But, mechanically, she managed a smile.

"I'm very glad to know you, Mrs. Hartland," she said.

The actress in her mastered the weakness of the woman. Oh, it was very cruel of him to subject her to this scene. But it was true that she had hung up without giving him a chance to speak.

Who was this girl? Had he married her to force Rola herself to marry John? Where had he met her? He couldn't be in love with her. Even now, as he looked down on her golden head, there was no tenderness in Ralph's eyes such as Rola had seen there five minutes after she met him.

And he had married this girl without loving her! Could there possibly be such friendship between men that one would sacrifice himself in order to make the other happy?

"Are you from New York, Mrs. Hartland?" Rola forced herself to ask.

"No, I'm from the West," the girl answered in a pleasing voice; "but I've been in New York for two years."

"We're very old friends," Ralph volunteered. "What is it you wanted to see me about, Rola?"

"Nothing important," she answered. "I'm sorry to intrude." She rose. "I hope you'll pardon me, Mrs. Hartland. My best wishes."

She couldn't get away quickly

enough. It was stifling in that room. She walked to the elevator with leaden feet. So that was the end. The man she loved had married another.

She went back home. There was no matinée that day. She was afraid she'd give a very poor performance that evening. Her heart was broken.

Wearily she dropped her hat and coat and sank down on the couch. If only she could cry! In that very room, on that very couch, Ralph had professed his love for her. And she had surrendered her heart to him.

She heard the noon whistles blowing. Two hours later she had not stirred. She had no desire for food. In fact, she had no desire to live—now. She kept thinking of Ralph and the woman he had married. It bothered her that she had seen that girl somewhere—but where? Of course if she had questioned her she would have found out. But it had been torture to sit there facing them.

A KNOCK on the door brought her suddenly back to reality.

"Come in," she called wearily, raising her head from the pillow.

The door was opened timidly. Rola couldn't believe her eyes. The blond girl—Ralph's wife—was coming into the room.

"Mrs. Hartland!" Rola cried out, as she sprang from the couch.

What in the world could *she* want here? At Rola's gesture the girl sat down slowly.

"I'm ashamed of myself," she said. "I was a fool for letting him influence me. I only hope that I haven't caused any real trouble. I'd never forgive myself if I did."

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Hartland."

"I'm not Mrs. Hartland," the girl said. "My name is Muriel Corning. I'm a stenographer at the hotel where Mr. Hartland is stopping."

"Then you're not married?" Rola asked.

"No. I borrowed the wedding band from one of the maids. If you'll listen to me I'll tell you just what happened."

"I won't interrupt," Rola promised.

"The first day Mr. Hartland came to the hotel," the girl began, "he telephoned down to the desk for a stenographer. I went to his room to do the work. He had several letters. I thought him very nice—a gentleman. And I enjoyed doing the work. The next day he called for me by name and gave me more work. He was very liberal in paying me, too. I've been doing his work every day.

"This morning I was in his room taking dictation when you telephoned. He seemed very nervous and excited when he hung up the receiver. I remember he went over to the window and stood there for a while, thinking. Then he turned to me.

"'Miss Corning,' he said, 'I'm in a little jam, and I wonder if you'll be kind enough to help me out. I did something very foolish a few days ago—got mixed up with a woman of questionable character. She seems to be trying to blackmail me. But if she believed that I was married, why—it would put an end to her schemes. *Would* you pose as my wife just for a few moments and let me introduce you as Mrs. Hartland when she comes here? You'd be doing me a tremendous favor, and I would appreciate it immensely.'"

"Oh!" Rola cried out. Then she caught herself. "Please continue."

"Well," Muriel said, "I had formed such a high opinion of him while doing his work that I believed

him. I've heard of cases like that happening to strangers in the city. And I felt sorry for him. He showed genuine regret about the whole thing. If he had offered to pay me for doing what he asked I would have hesitated. But he asked it as a favor. So I agreed.

"I borrowed a wedding band from one of the maids, hid my typewriter and the papers, and sat there on the couch waiting for you. But when you came in I was very much surprised. You didn't look like a "questionable character" to me. You didn't look like a blackmailer. And when you spoke, I couldn't connect you with anything crooked. You seemed to me like one of the sweetest persons I had ever met. I was looking at you when he told you I was his wife, and I noticed your eyes. They changed, as if a light had suddenly gone out in them. You tried hard not to show your feelings, but I guessed them.

"When you left, I felt that I had done something wrong. I felt cold—and—awful, as if I were a murderer and had taken a life.

"I said to Mr. Hartland, 'I can't believe what you said of that girl.'

"He looked at me sharply. 'Well,' he said, 'it proves you must never judge by looks. She's very clever, and doesn't look the part. That's what deceived me.'

"But I wasn't satisfied. After I finished my work I went down to my own cubby-hole. I asked one of the other stenographers if she had ever heard of a Miss Rola Erdway. The first name struck me as unusual.

"'Say,' she said to me, 'don't you ever go to the theater? Why, Rola Erdway is the star in that new musical comedy. She has black hair with little ringlets.'

"I was puzzled. I couldn't understand it. I began to believe that Mr. Hartland was the crook—that he was the one who was doing something wrong. And I had innocently helped him. I couldn't leave the hotel sooner. But I came here the minute I finished my work for the day.

"I don't know what it's all about, Miss Erdway, but what I've told you is the truth. And if you want me to tell it to his face I'll do it."

FOR a long time Rola was silent. It was just as she had thought, except that the marriage was only an imaginary one. Ralph was determined to have her marry John, and he had hoped to influence her by this bit of trickery. If she realized she couldn't have him, she have to turn to John.

Muriel rose. "I hope I haven't done any harm," she said. "You're much too nice to hurt. I must go, now."

"Wait a moment, please," Rola said. "Do you remember ever seeing me before?"

"I'm sure I haven't."

"And yet I have seen you somewhere, Miss Corning. Have you ever been on the stage?"

"No."

Muriel put up her hands to smooth her hair. Her dark sleeves made a frame for her face.

"Now I know!" Rola exclaimed. "It's your *picture* I remember."

"My picture?"

"Yes, I saw it over the fireplace in John's home."

"John?" The girl turned eagerly to Rola. "John Berwick?"

"Yes." Rola remembered the first time she had been at John's apartment. The picture was on the mantelpiece. And John had told her it was a dear friend of his. Later the picture was

removed and Rola's was put in its place.

"You know John?" the girl asked anxiously. "Is he—married?"

Rola noticed a strange look in Muriel's eyes, as if she were afraid of the answer.

"No, he is not married—yet," Rola said.

The girl relaxed, as from under a great strain.

"He told me that you were a dear friend of his," Rola said.

The girl's eyes brightened. "Then he still thinks of me? He still has my picture? Oh, Miss Erdway, you don't know how happy you've made me. Will you tell me where John lives? I must see him. We were sweethearts once, and we were going to be married. But my mother interfered. John was too poor to suit her. She watched me. She wouldn't let me see him. And she wouldn't let him in when he came to the house.

"And one day, without telling me, she announced my engagement to another man—a rich man whom I hated. I told my mother I'd never marry him, and I didn't. John thought I was throwing him over for money, and he left town. I've never seen him since.

"After mother died, about two years ago, I came to New York. I always felt that John had come here. He was very ambitious. And I've always been hoping that I would find him. Oh, it's wonderful to know that he's here. Every night I've prayed to God not to let him fall in love with another girl before I could find him."

SUDDENLY Muriel realized all that she was telling to Rola, who was practically a stranger to her. "I'm sorry I said so much," she apologized. "I guess I lost my head. I was so happy to learn about John. Will you tell me where I can find him?"

Rola hesitated. Life was a terrible series of complications. Would she be adding to them by sending this girl to John? It was quite evident that Muriel's love was sincere; that she had always carried John's image in her heart. But what of John? Had his love died when he learned she was engaged to a rich man? What of the picture that had always been before his eyes until it was supplanted by Rola's?

A happy thought entered Rola's mind. Suppose John *still* loved Muriel? Suppose he had only fallen in love with Rola because he thought Muriel was lost to him forever? It would be a wonderful solution to her own problem. Then she would be free to marry Ralph.

"You'll probably find John in his office now," Rola said. She gave her his address "Will you wait one moment, dear? I'd like you to take a note to him."

She sat down at her desk, took a sheet of paper and hastily scribbled a message:

DEAR JOHN:

I hope you love Muriel as much as she loves you. I think she's a dear; and you'll be wonderfully happy with her. We would never have been married, John. A few days ago I fell in love with another man. I meant to tell you this sooner. I'm sorry.

ROLA.

When Muriel had gone Rola felt strangely at peace. She didn't know that she had handled the situation in the best way. But she had let her hopes dictate her action. She wanted John to fall in love with Muriel again. Then Ralph, with his ironbound code of honor, would be free to declare his love.

She made a cup of tea and drank it

leisurely while she sat waiting for something to happen. Certainly she would hear from John very soon. There had to be some reaction.

Not more than an hour had passed when she heard a knock on her door. John and Muriel came in. Their faces fairly glowed with happiness. Rola didn't have to be told of the joy that was in their hearts at finding each other again. Like children they walked in with fingers interlocked.

"Are congratulations in order?" Rola asked.

"Yes," John answered. "But what about you, Rola? Why didn't you tell me sooner? It's Ralph you're in love with, isn't it?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"I understood it immediately," he said. "Muriel told me everything that happened, and it's as simple as A B C. You're in love with him, and he's in love with you. But the big coward ran away rather than face the music."

"Ran away?" Rola asked, with a sinking feeling in her heart.

"Yes." John took a note from his pocket and handed it to her. "Here, read it."

Rola unfolded the note. Her fingers trembled as she held it. Slowly she read:

DEAR JOHN:

I'm sorry to do this to you, but it couldn't be helped. I was married this morning and I'm leaving now on my honeymoon. Good luck to you, old pal.

RALPH.

"I called up his hotel," John said, "and they told me that he had checked out. I got his note before Muriel came in to see me. And I was boiling mad. I never thought he'd play a trick like that on me. Imagine going away without letting me see his wife.

"Now I understand it. He must have thought it over and realized that he had got himself into all sorts of complications by having Muriel pose as his wife. He could hardly expect her to go around with him and attend our wedding, too, especially when she seemed to doubt him after you left. So he took the only alternative and fled."

Muriel took hold of Rola's hand and squeezed it affectionately. "It will all come out right, dear," she said. "John has sent him a telegram, and when he gets it he'll come right back to you, I know."

"I'm going to take Muriel to the show to-night," John said. "She hasn't seen it yet. And then we'll all go to supper after the theater."

AT seven o'clock Rola went to her dressing room. As she applied the grease paint, she thought of Ralph. She could picture him on the train going farther and farther away from her. She wondered if he was thinking of her, too?

She marveled at his courage and his strength of character. How many men would have been willing to give up love for the sake of loyalty to a friend?

The performance went as smoothly as usual. Rola recognized Muriel and John sitting in the sixth row of the orchestra. Their shoulders were touching, and she had no doubt that they were holding hands. How happy Muriel looked. Rola understood what it meant to her to have the man she loved beside her.

After the show Muriel and John came to Rola's dressing room. Muriel brought her a great armful of roses.

"You're wonderful," Muriel exclaimed. "I hope we'll always be friends."

Soon they left the dressing room,

went through the stage door and into the street where John's car was parked.

"Look!" Muriel cried. "There he is!"

"Who?" John asked.

"Mr. Hartland!"

John looked but saw no sign of Ralph. Muriel, however, was forcing her away through the crowd. Ralph saw her and tried to disappear, but she reached him and caught his arm.

"You'll thank me for this," she said. "Come, Rola is waiting for you."

John came up then and took Ralph's other arm. "Come on, you old horse thief. This is going to be a big night for all of us."

They forced him into the car beside Rola. Muriel and John got in. The chauffeur drove off.

"I'll try to make the explanations as brief as possible," John said. "Muriel and I are old sweethearts. We discovered each other to-day. And the wedding bells will soon be ringing. That makes you and Rola free to follow our example."

Ralph took hold of Rola's hand. "Is that true?" he asked. "Or am I just dreaming it?"

"It's true, dear," she said. "Are you glad?"

"I'll show you how glad I am," he said.

He drew her to him and pressed his lips to hers in a kiss that made up for all she had suffered—a kiss that promised a lifetime of happiness—a kiss that welded their hearts and souls in burning union.

"We thought you had gone west," Rola said. "What were you doing on that street?"

"I was waiting for you," he said frankly. "I couldn't go home without a last look at you. I wanted to carry it back with me to the desert."

Awakening

I DARED to hope that I'd regained
The peaceful ways that once I knew
Before you brought me ecstasy—
Peace could not stay with love and you.

Almost I thought that I'd forgot
Those swift sweet days, so long ago—
Almost believed that love was dead—
Almost forgot I'd loved you so.

And then—lonely I saw the moon
Through tall trees making shadows deep;
But peace forsook my heart—I knew
Love was not dead, but just asleep!

—*Larry Latimer*

"Y-you!" she stammered

The Unknown Knight

Cold type from the columns of a newspaper proves to be the handwriting of Cupid!

By Ben Wright

"I WON'T do it," said Betty Whitmore, stamping her little foot emphatically. "It isn't as if your father needed you. He has his housekeeper, and—well, you must choose between him and me, and that's that."

"But, Betty, don't you see that I can't leave him when he wants us so badly? He is getting old, and he needs me. We can have most of the things you want if we live with him—things I cannot give you otherwise."

She turned her back to him, drew a slender arm across her eyes and repeated:

"No house is big enough for two families."

"There'll be only one family; you will be—"

"You are cruel, you don't love me," Betty cried, "or you wouldn't ask me! When I marry I'm going to marry one man, and he is going to be all mine—and it doesn't make much difference who it is, either." A little gasp escaped her, but she could not recall the words, and in her present frame of mind she would not take them back.

"Betty!" Dick Cummins was horrified. "You—don't mean that!"

She faced him defiantly. "Yes I

do! Men are all alike." Her black eyes snapped angrily.

"Then it is all over between us?" He gazed at her wistfully, perplexed.

"I suppose so." A trembly smile twisted her mouth.

She handed him his engagement ring and watched him slowly depart. Surely he could not suspect her anguish. She must not let him.

She was glad it was over, she thought. And half believed the assertion.

Why she would not consent to live in the same house with Dick's father she hardly knew; but she had long ago determined that Dick must yield in this; that she must have a little new bungalow all her own. She wanted her own house and Dick and no one else—for a time at least. Dick's income was not large, and she would have to do the housework; but she would, and she was sure she could. She had baked a cake once!

BETTY went to her room and had a good cry. She had done just right, she told herself. Dick was a brute. Dick ought to be severely punished.

Betty was just eighteen. For years it had been understood she would some day be Dick's wife. It seemed so dull and prosaic. She yearned for some thrill of romance, instead of a matter-of-fact, taken-for-granted courtship.

Dick ought to see that his duty to her required him to forsake his father and his mother (only he had no mother), and the comforts of his father's home, and to make a place in the world for her, himself.

Well, she was glad it was settled. Tears came to her eyes. Resolutely she forced them back. Now she might have a real romance. She had never had a chance with Dick hanging around. She would show Dick.

Dreams of a fiery romance filled her mind with Dick always in the background—tearing his heart out with jealousy.

Harry Richards was the logical man. He was popular with all the girls, and showed no preference for any of them. Harry was rich.

She ran downstairs to the telephone. A minute later she was asking Harry to call that night.

"Can't to-night, Betty," he replied. "I have an engagement; some other time, perhaps. Tell Dick I'm awfully sorry."

Tell Dick! Of course! Every one thought she belonged to Dick, and his friends would leave her severely alone as they always had. She must go outside of her immediate acquaintances; but how?

She strolled to the library table and idly fingered the morning paper there. Ah, happy thought!

Upstairs she scampered, and snatching pencil and paper from her topsy-turvy dresser, she curled up on the bed and wrote. After several efforts, and much chewing on the end of her pencil, she was satisfied with this:

> Romantic and affectionate girl with money wishes to meet nice, respectable man.

She recalled numerous notices she had read, and added: "Object matrimony."

Blithely she hurried to the newspaper office. Impatiently she waited for the publication next morning. Excitedly she scanned the want columns.

How cold, almost indecent, her contribution seemed in print! Betty trembled a little that afternoon when she presented the slip that entitled her to

the answers. She had brought her largest hand bag to carry them in, but there was only one reply! She hastened to her room and read a neatly typed note:

> My dear lady:
>
> Your notice interests me. I judge you to be one who is willing to take a chance. If you are serious and are willing to accept most of your romance after the wedding, meet me at the Imperial Café this evening at eight. I am reserving a private dining room—G. If you are not there at eight I will understand that you are not as game as you pretend to be. If you are, perhaps we will be on our honeymoon within a day or two. Lonesome.

This was a little more speedy than Betty had anticipated. A hasty marriage with one she had not yet seen! Could she do it?

She laughed, yet in her heart she was serious, frightened. Dared she meet the stranger?

What a shock it would be to Dick if she really married some one else within a few days!

She would do it. She would show him.

HER mind made up, Betty busied herself with plans for making herself attractive. She decided on the simple black dress that Dick liked, and which matched her hair perfectly. She spent much time on that raven hair. She must look her very best. She must make the man want her, and it would not be too late for her to back out if his appearance or manner did not suit her.

With no thought of turning back, her mind was wholly occupied with the thrill of the adventure. What would the outcome be? Would he be tall and handsome like Dick? Still appearance is not everything; surely he would not be so "bossy." And he was certainly romantic.

The time dragged, though she was busy every minute fixing, altering, rearranging.

Betty reached the café ahead of time, and decided to slip into the room without being noticed. She entered the building. The head waiter approached. He seemed to smile knowingly when she said she was to meet a gentleman in private room G. Had this romantic knight been so crude and thoughtless as to tell about the ad?

The table was bare, and the room was empty, but the waiter, without question, laid the service for two, filled her glass with ice water, and retired.

For some time she waited, thrilled with excitement. At last she heard the waiter say:

"The lady's here, sir."

As the door slowly opened, Betty half raised in her chair, in anxiety to see her new lover. A portly middle-aged man entered.

"Betty Whitmore!" he cried. "What—why?" The surprise in his voice changed to anger. "Did you put that advertisement in the paper? You young scamp! What do you mean, fooling a man old enough to be your father? You—"

Betty had recovered from her astonishment quickly, and now broke in mischievously, "Honestly, Mr. Cummins, what did you do it for?"

Dick's father sank into a chair. The angry red of his face changed to a shamed scarlet.

"Well, you see—"

They heard a light knock, the door opened and the waiter brought the menu. Betty thought hard, while Mr. Cummins selected an excellent meal.

When the waiter departed, her companion began:

"Now that we're here, dear child, let's forget everything else for a while, and enjoy the meal. After that we'll talk as long as you like."

He seemed perfectly at ease now, and even amused. He appeared to relish the excellent food he had ordered, and also the companionship of his son's ex-fiancée. His talk was really entertaining.

Betty realized that under other conditions she would have enjoyed herself exceedingly, but the meal was half over before her self-consciousness entirely left her. Mr. Cummins persisted in his efforts to put her at ease, and at last she became her natural vivacious self. Then she had a good time. She was surprised to find this man was as full of fun, jokes, banter and small talk as any of the young crowd, and there was an indefinable something, poise, perhaps, or personality, that made him more interesting than any one else she knew. He good-naturedly bested her in all her repartee—in fact, he proved himself an ideal dinner companion.

"NOW tell me all about it," Betty smiled when the waiter left his check, closed the door and retired.

Mr. Cummins made no pretense of not understanding, but puffed his cigar thoughtfully a while before he laid it down.

"I was serious in answering your advertisement, Betty," he explained. "I supposed it was written by some one who was lonesome, like me. I did not expect love. I merely expected companionship. For years I had planned on finding some one to provide the feminine touch that is so lacking in my life.

"This morning Dick told me your engagement was off." Mr. Cummins had difficulty in continuing, and Betty's eyes filled with tears. "I think I—was as much—broken up as he was.

"Not half an hour later my housekeeper told me she was leaving soon to get married. Then I saw your ad."

He reached across the table, took both her hands in his, and looked longingly into her eyes.

"Betty! I was desperate. I—"

He checked his impetuous speech and smiled.

"I was in earnest when I answered; had you been, I'd have tried to make good the suggestion in my letter. I'm a romantic old fool, I know, and—" He chuckled. "It would serve Dick right for breaking with you!"

He dropped her hands.

"Dick's a young fool, and I told him so," he continued. "I don't know what you quarreled about, but I have no doubt it was all his fault."

Betty felt the blood leaving her face.

"It was mine," she said simply. "I'm sorry—I'm sure he loves me; more," again her eyes twinkled, "than you do."

Cummins gazed at her a moment.

"Excuse me," he said, "I—I want to get a fresh cigar." He hurried from the room.

Betty, left alone, gazed at the thread of smoke curling up from the cigar that had scarcely been touched. What a world! Dick's father, of all people. Would he really propose?

And of course he would tell Dick all about this common adventure of hers, and she would be the laughing stock of the whole town.

Her head drooped upon the table and she began to weep quietly.

The door opened, and Mr. Cummins laid his hand on her black hair.

"Betty," his voice was soft and pleading, "I don't know what your quarrel is about, but whatever it is, if Dick will apologize and let you have your way, will you forgive and come to live with us?"

"No," sobbed Betty, still stubbornly. "But—I'll let him have *his* way—I want him to have his way—and I'll apologize if he'll ask me to. But—he—w-won't!"

She raised her tear-filled eyes.

"Why—why Dick!"

Again her head dropped to her arms, and she shook with sobs—happy sobs now, for it was Dick who dropped into a chair beside her, Dick's arm was around her shoulders, and Dick's voice said, "Dad phoned me that you were here. How did you meet him? He seldom goes anywhere."

Betty heard the door open and close and knew they were alone.

"I can't give you up, dearest," Dick continued. She felt a ring slipped on her finger. She did not resist, but still her face was hidden. "We'll live anywhere you say, only—"

She raised her head. "I won't live anywhere—"

She enjoyed Dick's gasp.

"—except with your father. I love him better than any other man in the world—" She tried to appear very serious, but as she watched the little smile play around the corners of his mouth, she knew she had not succeeded in keeping a roguish twinkle out of her eyes.

"—except you," she finished, as she laid her head upon Dick's shoulder, and raised her sweet lips for his kisses.

Miracle

THE world was but a void,
Until one day
You came with fragrances
That thrill the May.

Your beauty like a breath
Thrilled my soul through,
And all the earth became
Heaven in you!

—Edgar Daniel Kramer

A True Love Story

Not always does love bridge the gap between the mighty Prince and lowly Cinderella. Sometimes Cupid reverses the order

By Dorothy Dayton

EVERY town has a Eunice. She is the little girl who lives in the big white house on the hill, and whose father is the president of the biggest bank.

All the other girls envy her, and all the young men are crazy about her. It is she who has the snappiest clothes, who goes away to school. It is at her house that the biggest parties are given; she drives the dashing blue roadster.

Eunice is the girl who has everything that most girls want in life—clothes, beaux, cars, and the right background, and a rich husband waiting at the fashionable church as soon as she gets around to making up her mind.

That was the way with Eunice Lyle Swetman, daughter of O. G. Swetman, of Biloxi, Mississippi, president of the People's National Bank, very wealthy and socially prominent. And on top of that, Eunice herself was very pretty, very talented, with blue eyes, starry, like cornflowers in the spring, and goldish hair with a strong dash of red in it.

Red-headed girls are, as a rule, independent, and Eunice Swetman was no exception. And that is the real reason for one of the loveliest true romances which has come to public attention in the last few years—one of the loveliest because, instead of being the story of a poor girl suddenly transformed into a modern princess by some wealthy modern prince, Eunice's story is one of true love which overrode obstacles, made sacrifices, found poverty sweeter than riches, and in the end blossomed more happily and triumphantly because of it.

In the first place, Eunice wasn't satisfied to take everything that her father could give her. What, she often wondered, would she be like, if, like many another girl, she had nothing to offer the world but her own brains, her own personality, her own ingenuity? The idea of putting herself to this test dazzled her.

She decided first that she wanted to make her own living, and as a result she came to New York to study dramatic art. She worked hard, then went from agent to agent in an effort to get a part, and finally did succeed in getting a good part in a popular Broadway play, "The Shanghai Gesture." Certainly she had scaled the first few rungs of her ladder very fast; everybody predicted a brilliant and dazzling career for her.

Eunice soon found herself just as popular in New York as she had been

in Biloxi. Young men stormed the theater entrance to meet her. She might very easily have married a multi-millionaire, joined the swankiest social set down on Long Island, and achieved everything that wealth can offer—great wealth!

But at this stage, her career was all that mattered. For Eunice already had learned what some people never learn—that money alone can buy neither love nor happiness.

At that time Eunice had never been genuinely in love. Then one day it happened. It was in Chicago, at the Roosevelt Theater.

That night, after the play, a new doorman opened the door for her. He

Arch and Eunice Bonge

was six feet six inches tall, well-built and muscular, with a charming, boyish smile. Ordinarily she wouldn't have noticed the doorman at all. But this young man was very dark and handsome. It wasn't merely that, though. She had had many equally handsome admirers.

Perhaps it was that instantaneous recognition that often comes when a girl looks, for the first time, into the eyes of the man for whom destiny seems to have made her. At any rate, in that first quick startled flash of understanding, he made an extraordinary impression on her. She couldn't forget him.

At odd moments those dark eyes danced before her own. She spent many minutes, when she ought to have had her mind on her career, wondering about this young man: who he was, what he was doing. Was he merely an ordinary doorman and interested in nothing better?

Almost unconsciously she found that she was taking particular pains with her dress, trying this and that color combination, taking a hasty glance into her vanity mirror before entering the theater every evening. She merely nodded brightly at him; he made no attempt to get acquainted with her. He was, in fact, very shy, she thought. Yet every time their eyes met she had that feeling that there was a certain secret understanding between them. And, with a girl's intuition, she knew that he felt it, too.

Several days passed.

Soon that brief moment when he opened the door for her became the biggest and most important moment of the entire day. It was sweeter than the praise of critics; more thrilling than the applause that came from over the footlights.

Then, suddenly, the show left Chicago.

One can imagine the pang of regret in Eunice's heart. Why hadn't she got acquainted with him? Why hadn't she found out anything about him? Perhaps, in her heart, she had been afraid that he might have proved an ignorant, uninteresting young man, and she didn't want to prick her bright bubble of illusion. She found, even in the rush of her busy, exciting life in New York, that she still frequently found herself thinking about him. She'd probably never see him again.

But perhaps destiny does take a hand in these things, when two people really are the *right two*. At any rate, Eunice had not been back in New York many months, when one day she felt a sudden urge to go to a movie—the Paramount Theater, one of the biggest and most dazzling moving picture houses in the world. And who should open the door for her but Arch Bonge, looking even taller and straighter and handsomer than she remembered him, in his blue and red and gold uniform.

Her heart gave the same old glad start. But this time she wouldn't let opportunity slip. She caught the bewildered young man's hand, as though greeting an old friend.

"Whatever are you doing in New York? And how nice to see you again."

The ice was broken. They chatted a little, but mostly they looked into each other's eyes. From that time on Eunice became quite a movie fan, and the Paramount was her favorite theater.

"The first time I saw you," he told her, "I wanted you for my model of spring. Spring is what you remind me of."

"Your model?" asked Eunice. "Why, are you an artist?"

"Trying to be," replied the young man modestly. "And some day, maybe—"

Then he invited her down to his tiny studio in Greenwich Village, to see his work. She went joyfully the next afternoon, and they made tea together over a ten-cent alcohol stand from the corner drug store. He had been brought up on a farm, she discovered, been a famous football player at the University of Nebraska, worked his way through college, and now he was working his way through art school, being a doorman at night, to leave his days free for his painting.

Eunice admired the pictures—but she admired the artist more. The friendship developed quickly. Under her encouragement, he worked harder than ever, and soon began making great strides in his studies. She fired him with new ambition. And it wasn't long until his career seemed far more interesting to her than her own.

One night he said: "I wanted you for my model of spring the first moment I saw you. By the time I had opened the door for you I wanted you for my wife."

But he had not dared to dream, he said, that the successful actress could be interested in him. And he wouldn't marry her until he really had made good. Eunice insisted that money made no difference to her; that with him, she'd be perfectly happy without it. And anyhow, why worry about money, when she had plenty?

"We'll live on what I can make, or it's all off," said the six foot six Arch, looking down at the five foot two Eunice.

The next day he sold his first painting for a thousand dollars! Enough for a trip to Biloxi, and a honeymoon of some kind.

They were married in Biloxi, Mississippi, in the big white house on the hill, with the approval of both her parents. But you'd never in the world guess where they spent their honeymoon!

In a piano box, no less! Oh, an extra size one, of course, to accommodate Arch's six feet six.

Both of them loved the outdoors. It was summer, and her younger brother had built a toy house from a huge piano box on a beautiful site on the picturesque Tohouticafouffa River.

When they returned to New York they went to live in the tiny one-room studio on Horatio Street, where Eunice had a grand time making curtains, lovely goldish ones, and covering pillows, and waiting happily until such a time as Arch shall be really famous.

"But we won't be any happier than we are now—not even when we go to Paris," Eunice insisted. "We won't be any happier, because we can't be any happier. There isn't that much happiness!"

Planets of Destiny

Professor GUSTAVE MEYER, Conductor

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

DAILY GUIDE FOR LATTER HALF OF JUNE

16th—Bad for dealing with old people in the morning. Good thereafter for investing.

17th—Unfavorable in the morning. Lie low.

18th—Pick the afternoon for beginning journey and making any changes necessary.

19th—It looks like a poor day for poker players! Avoid any form of gambling.

20th—An inflammable day for those with hot tempers. If tempted to do it, don't. Investigate thoroughly before you sign anything during the afternoon hours.

21st—Negative in the morning. In the afternoon the business outlook should be good. Deals which have been hanging fire could be closed on this day.

22nd—Any important interviews with women should be postponed by either sex. Shopping tours wouldn't be apt to result satisfactorily. In the afternoon transfers of property, such as real estate, could be handled with success.

23rd—A day apt to be too active. If you must take important steps, be sure you are not led astray by impulsive and unthoughtful decisions.

24th—Favors to be sought would have very good chances of success during the morning hours.

25th—A day to stimulate mental activity, especially that of inventors. The minds of people generally should be very keen.

26th—Toward late afternoon be careful of accidents. Take no chances.

27th—This would be a good morning for having that proposed operation. Quick and successful recuperation is indicated. A day for advancement and success for military people, policemen, and firemen.

28th—Better save time by not going on journeys, because these would be fruitless. In

the afternoon, successful parties or entertainments generally could be given.

29th—The journeys you didn't take yesterday may be taken to-day, and be for the best. However, if you are traveling in the afternoon, take extra good care of your purse.

30th—Salesmen with tough customers would find themselves better able to close their deals in the afternoon.

Astrology can't tell you, Miss M. J. A. B., born July 21, 1913. The most promising years for you, matrimonially speaking, would be your twenty-first, twenty-third and twenty-fifth.

I should say that is almost a certainty, Miss M. E., born April 27, 1912. In fact, you may have more than one opportunity, regardless of how you decide. Looks to me as though your only chance to stay single would be by a very determined "No" on your part. The next three years ought to be propitious emotionally.

Miss M. D. L., born June 30, 1909, how can I tell you what your future husband, if any, will be like unless I have his birth data. Always willing to help, but can't do impossibilities. When you find the man, tell me when he was born, and I'll tell you whether or not to marry him. You're a pretty cautious little girl anyway, too mistrustful generally to be easily led into an undesirable alliance.

If you've been reading this department, "Calgary," born December 19, 1908, you'll know that I do not answer any question pertaining to fatalism. Those born under your sign, Sagittarius, are apt to be slower to take the matrimonial hurdle. However, when you do settle your affections on any one, you can be very loyal and affectionate. You may feel the latter emotion quickening your heart beats about two years from this summer.

I don't know about the imminence of romance for you, Miss L. B., born June 16, 1910, but I do know that you ought to have many emotional experiences throughout your life. Particularly just now you are under influences which make you sensitive to romance in any form. I don't think that you will ever lack opportunities to marry. It might be that you will be tempted more than once, but unless you steady down later on in life your tendency to flirtatiousness is apt to net you quick but not lasting contacts.

You didn't give your initials, born March 1, 1911, but in answer to your question I am sure I do not know why not. You may not be quite as instantly popular with boys as some other girls, but when you do find some one who attracts you mentally and spiritually also, there is no reason why you should not have a quite happy marriage before you. Perhaps your twenty-third or twenty-fifth year would be most propitious for considering such a step.

Better wait until you have picked your man, Miss E. K., born October 4, 1911, and then let me have his birth data. As I cannot say too often, astrology cannot make up anybody's mind for them. All I can do is point out the times when you may be led to think seriously of love, and to warn you against others that might not result so satisfactorily. Good years for you should be your twenty-first, twenty-third and twenty-fifth. I appreciate all you say about us.

Can't send you a personal answer, Miss E. F., born December 30, 1882, since you did not inclose the necessary ten cents to cover cost of mailing. However, the answer to your question seems to be no. But you don't need to regret that; he would never have meant happiness to you anyway.

Here's another reader inclined to leave us without any clew to her identity. Birth was March 8, 1899. Dressmaking, millinery or anything to do with feminine wearing apparel would be a good career for her. Also the various domestic professions, such as trained dietician, etc.

Mr. E. M., born March 4, 1910. It is easy to see why your thought turns to aviation. Either that or something having to do with machinery, electricity or the handling of tools would be a good bet for you. But here's a tip: whatever you ultimately select to do, force yourself to stick to it. You are too apt to change both jobs and localities through sheer love of variety.

That is far too large a question for me, Mr. F. P., born March 24, 1906. If I wanted to sit down and tell you what the stars have in store for you, none of the other readers would stand a chance of getting an answer. Ask me another.

Mrs. S. C. F., born October 29, 1889, should have a much better year this year than she has for some time past in both health and general outlook. Benefits are indicated through friends. That is the silver lining, now for the cloud: some time during the summer, some loss and slight trouble is threatening her hus-

band, but with care and forethought this can be obviated.

Success comes to you slowly, but surely every time, Miss C. F., born December 19, 1883. Conditions for you right now look fairly promising for success in this particular undertaking. You have a strong Jupiter in your horoscope, and every indication that a satisfactory financial independence should be yours ultimately. It is rather difficult for me, you know, to answer you in any but a general way, since you give me no details. If you have need of future help, write me again.

Electrical engineering, Mr. G. S., born September 12, 1907, is the best possible bet for you, but your chart is not so promising on the inventive side. However, you are very practical. Any branch of engineering is suitable for you as a career—mechanical, marine or electrical. You need a little more self-confidence, and if you will allow me to give you another hint, you cannot go far in your profession without sufficient schooling. No client could be impressed by a letter as badly spelled as yours. When you go to school perfect this.

Just as well to tell you, Mrs. F. L. H., born June 16, 1878, that love and marriage for you will never promise much happiness. I doubt if you will ever marry again; but on the other hand, don't you think after what you've been through that that is a gain on the right side? For you there is no happy medium in life; when you have troubles, you have 'em! Configurations at your birth were not auspicious for happiness through marriage. Yet although many of your ventures through life began unhappily, these usually turned out better than you expected. Am I right? Also, you have never been without several interests, both emotional and material.

Under no circumstances make a change now, born March 2, 1897. You will be tempted to do so particularly from the autumn of this year on, but any change you would make would be against your best interests. If you are still of the same mind several years from now, you might write in again and I'll see what the prospects are then. You probably sense that you are apt to be too reticent and timid, and this is so. But it appears that this particular time would be the wrong time to do anything radical.

Far and away too young, Miss N. R., to ask me any such question. Twenty years from now, yes! Happiness touches every life at least once during its span, so don't begin to wonder if you have missed any at the age of nineteen years. Your horoscope promises you a fair amount of hard-earned prosperity as you advance in years, but your best successes will come toward middle age. Don't give way to your natural melancholy tendencies. You have many gifts which you should develop. 1933 will be a better year than any you have had thus far.

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

PROFESSOR GUSTAVE MEYER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon is not good after June 28. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

.....

.....

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

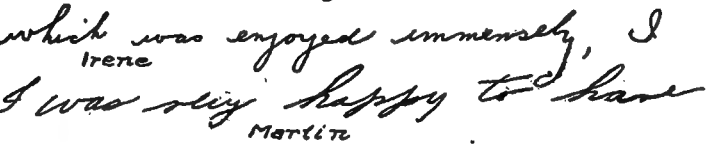
As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

THE thing that is giving me as much of a thrill, at the present moment, as the anticipation of my forthcoming vacation next month, is the increasing desire on the part of my readers to learn more about this fascinating science of graphology. Being such a universal subject, as well as a personal one, every day I find my mail containing many requests from old and young to "tell us a little more about the pot-hooks and the 't' bars, as you did a month ago."

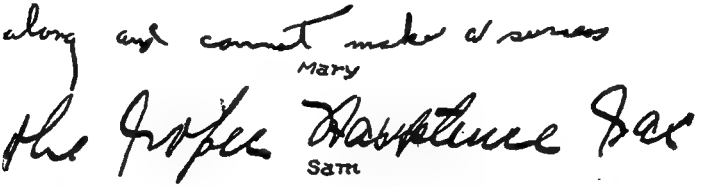
To my way of thinking, this is as it should be, for there is no more enlightening study in the world than the reading and analyzing of the individual's characteristics by handwriting. The pen strokes of a writer display so many of his eccentricities and failings, it really pays one to get this first-hand information about himself.

In the hope of satisfying those inquiring readers, I am continuing this popular section in the present issue.

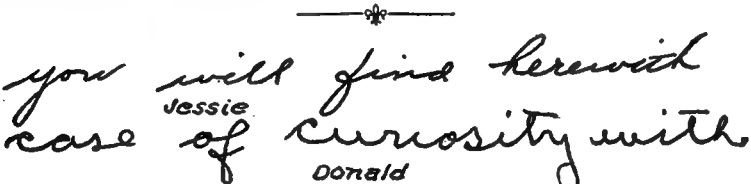
SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS



(Miss Irene H., Dayton, Ohio.) Your two samples of handwriting interested me very much, for they bespeak harmony, common sense, and real affection. Martin has the stronger nature of the two, and that is as it should be. He has lots of pep, and evidently a strong desire to climb the ladder of success. He is an optimistic young fellow, and out to do his bit in the world. When I look at your pen strokes I see clearly that you are not as robust physically as you might be. You are nervous and excitable at times—I should say most of the time. You have a very feminine nature, and though you can hold up your own end as far as talking is concerned, on the other hand you evidently cannot stand up for your own rights very much. You lack courage when you have to "sell yourself" to another person. This is entirely due to a want of self-confidence. Sentimentally, you are on a par, and I'm sure you love Martin with all the tenderness of a pure-minded girl, and he loves you with all the sincerity of a young red-blooded American. My advice to you is get married by all means, and may my blessing go with you.

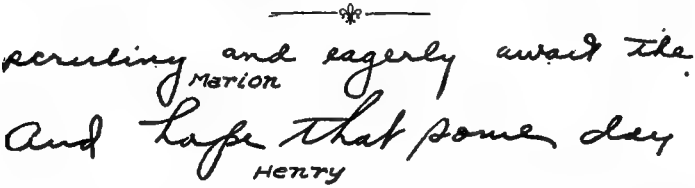


(Miss Mary N., Paterson, N. J.) You have picked a real he-man as a life companion, Mary. There is nothing wishy-washy about this fellow. He is muscular as well as honest. Of course, I would not call him an angel by any means. He has got far too mean a temper to be included among the heavenly host. He likes his own way, and what he says goes! You impress me as the type of girl who idolizes strength and muscularity. In other words, you love a big man whose word is law, and whose presence is commanding. You are a visionary in a certain sense of the word. You dream fantastic dreams about your future. Next to your strong imaginative power, you are analytical to a degree. You are not an out-of-doors girl. You are a student and a lover of books. You simply live in that brain of yours, and look upon ideas as the only real things in life. You two young folk are a study in contrasts, and I have no doubt the one nature will act as a balance to the other. I see no valid reason why you should not be happy with Sam as a husband, and he with you as a wife. And be sure to let me know how it works out!



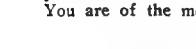
(Miss Jessie C., New Haven, Conn.) I sympathize with you in your dilemma, Jessie, but I'm afraid it's the old story that "the course of true love never did run smooth." Of

course, I don't think your case is any worse than many another. Donald is all you say, according to my analysis of his penmanship, but the fact of the matter is you are not suited to each other. Your tastes, your tempers and your general outlook on life are at sixes and sevens. In the first place, you are a woman of the world with lots of business acumen in your make-up. You are no weak sister, nor clinging vine. You could take your place with any man I know. Your personality has that magnetism which is nothing short of commanding. Your sincerity of purpose has no counterfeit ring about it. It is genuine and wholesome. Your sweetheart, on the other hand, is stiff and vacillating (as you say he is). He is up one day, and down the next. The fact of the matter is the boy has been spoiled in his upbringing. I hesitate to encourage you in this courtship, Jessie. Your chances of happiness are very slender if you consent to marry this boy. I'm sorry, but this is my opinion of your sweetheart. Don't you think you would be wiser to wait?

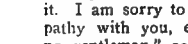


(Miss Marion S., Providence, R. I.) My first word to you is a word of congratulation on your choice of sweetheart. Henry is every inch a manly fellow who has push and sincerity stamped all over his nature. He is an individual whose presence will be known wherever he goes. He looks out on the world with a sane understanding of the values of things. He is the type of man who makes good in everything he undertakes. To come to yourself, Marion, you are not very far behind your fiancé in intellect and common sense. You are of the more reserved and cautious type of persons who always think before they speak. You appear to be a very independent sort of maid who is accustomed to stand on her own two feet and call a spade a spade. You are also very matter-of-fact in the way you speak. Your will power is not lacking in any sense of the word. In fact, you would be almost obstinate at times in demanding what you consider your rightful due. As far as compatibility of natures is concerned, I would say that you are well-mated, and ought to be very happy as husband and wife. I wish you the best of luck.

YOUR CAREER



(Miss Olive M., Chicago, Ill.) I was interested in what you said in your letter about so many chances "going over your head." Personally, I don't see much getting away from you. You are holding down a position which tens of thousands of women to-day would be glad to have for half the salary you are receiving. You are well off and you don't know it. I am sorry to say I have not much sympathy with you, even though your boss "is no gentleman," as you put it. To be supervisor of girls in a large organization such as yours is no sinecure, and the duties connected with it may be onerous, but nevertheless you are always certain of your pay envelope every Saturday, which is more than millions of skilled men and women can boast of in these days of unemployment. No, Olive, I wouldn't advise you "to throw up the darned job" and start a business of your own. Stay where you are until we see signs of real prosperity in the country. Excuse me for saying so, Olive, but I observe by your "D's" and "T's" that you talk far too much for your own good. Probably the trouble in the office can be traced to this particular foible of yours. Remember, a shut mouth catches no flies, and you would do well to be more like the old woman's parrot—not much of a talker, but a devil of a thinker!



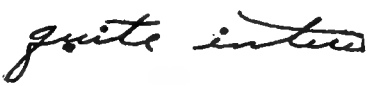
(Miss Roberta W., Oil City, Pa.) You impress me as a woman who has been accustomed all her life to attending to details. Nothing is ever too small for your careful attention. Needless to say there are many things which a girl of your ability and talent could do. In an office, for instance, you would be invaluable as a bookkeeper where accuracy in figures is essential. Your best niche, however, would be in some public library, em-

HERE ARE SOME HINTS:

PERSONS MAKING FLOURISHES WITHIN THE LOWER LOOPS LIKE THESE—

are easily influenced by a stronger will. They possess very little "back-bone," and consequently get into bad habits. It is sometimes a sign of some bad moral habit existing in the writer's nature.

IF YOU PLACE THE DOT OF THE SMALL "i" CLOSE TO LETTER LIKE THIS—



it shows that you have a very retentive memory. You are not a person who gets into a state of excitement quickly. You are level-headed, and not at all romantic. You are a better student than a sweetheart.

IF YOU INFLATE YOUR UPPER LOOPS LIKE THESE—

you are sure to be an unreasonable sort of person. You expect the impossible from other people. You are very sensitive yourself to criticism, and cannot bear to be told that you are wrong about anything. This always bespeaks a "touchy" disposition.

A PLAIN CAPITAL LETTER LIKE THIS—

clearly shows that you are a person of taste, refinement, and good breeding. You believe in simplicity in all things—dress, living, and habits. People with quiet, artistic temperaments always write plain capital letters, and without any flourishes to them.

IF BY ANY CHANCE YOU MAKE WAVY DASHES OVER THE SMALL "i" LIKE THIS—

it is a sure sign that you are a fun-loving individual. You would always be the life of the party. This is by no means a bad characteristic, though, on the other hand, wavy dashes over the "i" tell many a fellow that his sweetheart is inconstant in her affection. It is seen more in feminine scripts than in masculine.

IF YOU MAKE YOUR CAPITALS IN THIS SEVERE MANNER—

you evidently have artistic ability, and have a good eye for form. On the other hand, we seldom find such writers possessed of the "milk of human kindness." They are strong in talent, but weak in sentiment.

ployed in the listing and classification of books. I'm sure this would appeal to you more strongly than the routine of ledgers or cash-books. The salary of a librarian is not so large as the wages paid in some mercantile firm, but to you whose tendency is to be book-ish, literature would be much more interesting and inspiring. When I look at your negative traits, I notice you are nervous and excitable. Your impatience is somewhat abnormal, and your temper is nothing to be proud of. All this is probably due to the fact that you have been overstudying. I would advise you to take a good rest before you ever think of applying for a position.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

me an analysis

(Miss Louise S., Philadelphia, Pa.) You have a nature with transparent qualities—easily seen, and close to the surface. Talkativeness is one of your besetting sins, and a lack of tact will be a hindrance to your progress in life. I observe lots of self-importance in your nature. You certainly believe in display. You are never happy unless you are the center of attraction. You are a very affectionate girl, and enjoy being in men's company. Your pen strokes further inform me that you have a somewhat insistent disposition. Like many of your sisters, you love to have your own way. As a little girl I guess you simply stampeded all over the house when your mother denied you something you were fond of. When it comes to generosity, however, this is more than a trait with you, it is a habit which is splendid in one way, and not so good in another. As a matter of fact, you are too generous. There is no end to your open-handedness. I'm sure you would be always welcome in church circles where money is usually a scarce commodity. I wouldn't mind introducing you to my own minister! Our organ needs repairing. Altogether, I would say that you are head and shoulders above many women in intellect and ability.

tell me of my hand

(Miss Mary K., Montclair, N. J.) For a girl of your age—twenty-three—you appear to have a well-developed sense of business and technical matters. With this, coupled with your ambition and buoyant spirit, you are fit to tackle any man's job, and, in nine times out of ten, go in and win. I would call you one of those fortunate individuals endowed with lots of natural talent. Your widespread script indicates that you are generous to a degree. You are never happier than when on a shopping expedition. You simply love to spend money. In looking at your weak traits, I discover that you are apt to be very insistent in your demands on others. You are a little bit spoiled, if anything. You must have your own way, and can be very dogmatic when you want to be. Your poor mother must have put in some hectic days since her darling baby made her appearance! After all you are only human. So cheer up, for you have many fine qualities to be proud of.

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR ANALYSIS

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after June 28. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
—Your Career.
—Character Analysis.
(Check which you prefer. One coupon must accompany each choice.)

Name.....

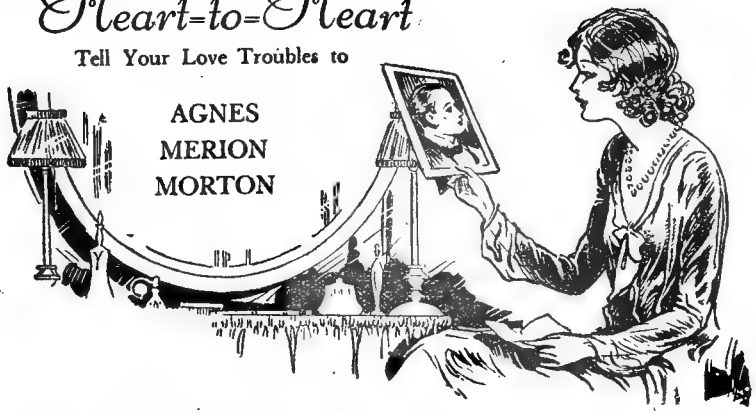
Street and No. .....

City..... State..... .

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES
MERION
MORTON



MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

KALA STRAUS, who calls her own case "Abie's Irish Rose" reversed, has had several interesting letters of advice. A few of them are printed below, and when Kala has read the varying opinions I presume she will feel authorized to do—just what she wants to do.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I always read your department and have learned some lessons from your cheery answers. There are so few of us who have an ideal life. Nearly every one of us has something to mar our complete happiness.

My letter is not a plea for solace. I seem to be getting along fine—now. Kala Straus's letter sort of struck home with me. My "affair" was not a religious controversy, though. I am, by profession, a nurse. During the course of my training I became ardently infatuated with a doctor twelve years my senior. The family thoroughly approved, and soon he proposed. I walked on air for a time and then, with a jolt, came down to earth.

I had a patient, a young man near my own age, who was seemingly attracted to me. I found myself thinking of him quite a lot more than was proper. When it was time for him to leave the hospital, I found I couldn't bear losing sight of him. He apparently felt the same, and we were together as often as was possible "on the sly." Soon the family found it out, and I was on the mat. All I could hear for weeks after was, "Position, reputation, money, and unforgivable." I was living in terror. I told my fiancé the truth, and he seemed to feel that I should keep my promise to him. I really couldn't, though, Mrs. Morton, so we eloped and came back for the blessing. We didn't get any, and were told to close the door as we went out.

I was heartbroken, and my husband did everything to console me. Love is the most wonderful thing in the world, for it soon made me realize the selfishness of my parents. I guess our devotion to each other made them see light, too, for they were soon calling on us for forgiveness. Everything is fine now, and I'm wonderfully happy. I thank God for giving me the courage to choose as I did. How awful it would have been if I'd listened to unthinking parents!

So, Kala, take your happiness now. If your parents really love you they will welcome you with open arms. They probably have a "skeleton in their closet," too, and will be willing to overlook a lot after you've taken

the step. After all, there is nothing greater than love, for didn't it make the world in the beginning, and will it not keep the world going till the end? Let's hear from you soon, Kala, telling us all about the wedding.

With just heaps of good wishes from

A HAPPY WIFE.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I don't believe in intermarriage as a general thing, although it has happened in my own family a couple of times. If relatives wouldn't interfere, and if there weren't always some controversy about how to bring up the children of mixed marriages, it would be different. But there are always those difficulties to consider.

However, the letter signed "Kala Straus" would convince anybody that here are two young people meant for each other, no matter what the barriers. A man and girl who have loved each other for five years, during two of which they were completely separated! Why, they've proved their case over and over, so I say bless you, my children.

ELODIE.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I don't know whether my story will help Kala Straus (what a beautiful Jewish name that is!) or not, but she is welcome to hear it for what it's worth. I was born a Jew, in an orthodox Jewish home, and I used to say, and think sincerely, that I had too much respect for my father and mother to marry outside my religion, knowing what it would mean to them. But there's a little god who does not understand these things, and when he got busy with my affairs I soon learned that I hadn't known what I was talking about. I fell deeply in love with a Christian girl, and she with me. We struggled against it as Kala and her lover have seemed to do, but it was no use. We did not do anything underhanded. We both went to her parents and then to mine and told them what we meant to do, and since we were both of age they could not forbid it. My mother was more liberal than my father, and I thought at first that *her* mother would never get over it, but the time came, after we had been married a few months, when we were both welcome in each other's homes.

Nothing could have been happier than our own home was, but she was taken from me when our third anniversary was only a few days off. I married again, after a while, for a home and companionship, but I have never regretted that first wonderful experience. I would live the same life over if I had to live again.

DAVID ROTHSTEIN.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

About this intermarriage question—my observation has been that it doesn't work. I don't mean to be hidebound or set in my opinions, or anything like that, but relatives usually make a lot of trouble, even if the pair themselves get along all right. You see, Kala, now you're in love you see only the man you want, but after you're married all the little differences of background and upbringing will begin to show. Marriage is an obstacle race anyway. Why start it with a handicap? I did have just a little broadmindedness on the subject once, and thought it might work in certain cases, but after I read "The Island Within," which is the story of an intermarriage, I decided that the risk isn't worth while.

A. M.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a constant reader of ALL-STORY, and I'm much interested in your article, and I begin to think I need your help. I've been going with a fellow for about five months, and I love him more than I ever loved any one else. I'm sure he loves me also, and he has asked me to be his wife, but he said he wants to wait a year or so because he thinks we ought to have a foundation to build on.

Now, Mrs. Morton, I don't think it's wise to put it off. So many things might happen to part us. I'd marry him to-morrow, and I'm sure we could save more by doing so. How can I make him understand that I don't want to wait a whole year? Please write and give me some advice.

FLORIDA FLOWER.

Please don't be offended when I tell you that I think your young man is right, and you are wrong. Of course, I know it is hard sometimes to wait, but it's far wiser. It costs so much to live, and you never know what may happen in the way of big extra expenses—illness, babies, loss of one sort or another—and then it is a comfort to have a little laid by in the bank.

All honor to your young man and his level head! It won't hurt you to be patient, to get better acquainted with each other, to work and save together for the future, like the thrifty ant. It is not possible, whatever you may think, for two to live more cheaply than one. This year will fly by before you realize it, busy and happy as you will be, and when you see your bank account growing you have no idea what a safe feeling it will give you, before you risk married life with nothing to fall back upon in times of stress. As for "something happening" to part you before a year is out, my dear, do you really consider that a serious objection? If anything could part you during a comparatively short engagement, then you ought to be glad of it. How could your love ever weather the vicissitudes of married life if it cannot endure for a year beforehand?

DEAR SADIE:

I don't see what else you can do, but put your kiddies in a home. You can sign some papers so they won't adopt them. Don't ever take that husband back again.

No, your father is right. I suppose he feels

you should have left him long ago. I know I do. Good luck!

PEARLE OF TEXAS.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have a very difficult problem to solve, and would like to get your advice on it. I am a girl of seventeen and very much in love with a man past twenty. He loves me, too, but my folks oppose our going together and want me to keep on going to school. I hate school and do not do very well at it. But my folks can't see more than one side of anything.

What shall I do? Quit school and marry him, or go on to school and make a failure out of my work? I would like your advice as soon as possible.

VIOLA B.

Viola, has it ever occurred to you that there is another alternative? Why can't you go to school and make a *success* of it instead of a "failure"? Why do you imagine that it is inevitable for you to fail at your school work? I'm sure, if you try, you can do as well as the next one, and it ought to be a matter of pride with you to do it. Most people would be glad to have the opportunity to complete their education; most people regret it very much if they neglect their opportunities. Whatever happens to you in later life, you will profit by what you learn. Better jobs, better friends, better chances of every kind will be open to you, the more you know, and your own inner resources, on which we all have to depend more or less in life, will be immeasurably increased by your knowledge of worthwhile things.

As for getting married—oh, Viola, haven't you read enough letters in this department from girls who married in their teens and woke up to find they had not realized in the least what they were in for? No boy of twenty is fit to be a husband, in the first place, and a girl has only herself to blame if she risks the serious business of marriage with him. The answer is No, Viola. I don't want you writing to us again in a few months, or a year, to tell us that you married him and are sorry.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I happened to read an ALL-STORY to-night that a friend let me take. I read about Larry, and I feel very sorry for the kid, for it is a hard blow. I can see how bad he feels about this girl. I am not heartless; I am human, too. Why doesn't he go away from that town and make new friends, and he may in time meet a girl that would return his love. I am sure that he can forget the other girl in another place. I do feel sorry, for I can picture how I would feel if that happened to me.

Larry boy, why don't you try that? I am sure you would forget her. I always hoped to marry a kid I went to school with, but he got married a year ago, and I just had to make up my mind to forget, so, Larry, you can do the same if you want to. I know you can. You must have a will power of some kind. No girl or fellow is worth killing yourself over.

Gee, you must think I am an old hen or something, but I am only twenty-two. Even when a child I had to go without things I wanted, but if I didn't get them I made up my mind that something bigger than I am didn't want me to have them, so I got in the habit of thinking, "Well, I can't have it. I won't cry over it." My brothers and sisters think I am hardboiled, but they don't know me.

So, Larry boy, try to get it into your head that you can't have her and try to get another girl. She may be far better than the last girl. Try, won't you? You can. I know you can.

LORETTA.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Perhaps you'll think I'm foolish to write to you concerning a matter that I could, or should, try to figure out myself, but I want another opinion besides my own about it.

I am a young girl twenty-one years old, and have been going with a boy one year older than myself for about two years. I really love this boy, but he isn't worthy of a girl's love. That's a terrible thing to say about some one you love, but loving him doesn't make it any the less true. He drinks, gambles, and is jealous of my every friend. I have tried to tear this feeling for him out of my heart, but thus far it has been impossible. He has done enough to hurt me to make my love for him die, but it seems that the more he does, the more I want to do to keep him from going completely to the dogs. I've been reared by a father and mother who have taught me to abhor just such things as he is guilty of. Why do we have to let our love go undirected? That's always been a puzzle to me.

Now, there is another man, about twenty-eight, who wants to marry me. I don't love him as I do the first mentioned, but I have deep admiration and respect for him. He has already had his "fling," and is everything desirable for a husband. The question is, "Should I follow my heart or my head?"

I don't feel as if can trust my future to the first one, and yet, I wonder what life would be like with a man whom I don't love. Do you suppose I could learn to love him? He seems to worship me. (This isn't conceit.) And he and my family are the best of friends. Whereas the former is barely on speaking terms with my father. Please help me to solve this problem, and I shall abide by your advice.

ELENOR.

I wonder if you really will "abide by my advice"? It is—do not marry anybody just yet. You could not be happy with the best man on earth while your heart is given to a wastrel. It's an unfortunate way hearts have,

of straying from where it is to a person's own best interest to love.

Try *harder* to get this unwelcome love out of your heart, for if you yourself can see how you have thrown your affections away, there is nothing I can add to make it stronger. Only, dear, there is nothing at all beautiful or romantic about being married to a man who needs to be "kept" from "going to the dogs." If he can't reform for his own sake, he would only drag you down with him. You would be trying to push a stone uphill all your life. Use your efforts on something that is a little better material to start with, Elenor.

Some sort of satisfying work would help you just at present more than getting married to some one else would. I hope that in time you will come to feel that this older man, or some one with the same excellent qualities, is truly the right mate for you, and that you can marry without all these doubts and fears. But it would not be fair at present, either to yourself or him. Have you ever thought what you would like to be and do in the world—you, yourself, as an individual—not just some man's wife? Think it over and decide, and then work for it with all your heart and soul. I congratulate you that you have the good sense to see the warning signals, to face the facts, and not willfully throw yourself away on one so unworthy. You are young enough to wait, to hold fast to your ideals, and live your own life without a man in it for a while, until your feelings are a little more settled.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am not in trouble, but just lonely. I hate to write letters, so I can't have any pen pals. Somehow, I don't interest the girls much, or the boys either. I know I am poor and can't afford clothes that some boys have. I have to work for all the spending money and clothes I get. But it seems like nobody cares for me at all, except my mother and father.

I get so restless I can't stay at home, and when I leave I have to go to a show or just walk by myself. You don't know how lonely it can be to know that everybody cares nothing about you.

I'm cheerful and some say I am quite entertaining, but I just seem not to get into the hearts of the people in my home town. Every other town I go to it seems like everybody likes me. So I have thought of leaving home and going where somebody cares for me.

I guess the reason people shun me is because I have such set ideas on some things, and because I am poor and can't spend money on them as I should like to if I had it. Please write me a long letter telling me why I am not wanted, and how I can be liked.

JUNIOR, NORTH DAKOTA.

Some people are not meant to be universally popular, but to have only a few good friends. Perhaps that is better, in a way, because when we have crowds of acquaintances we can touch only the surface of the other people's lives, and are not necessary to them, nor they to us.

Now how shall we go about finding just the two or three for you? Well, to begin with, if you are too "set" in your opinions and the way you express them, and recognize it yourself, why not try being a little more liberal? There is a general trend to-day toward loosening up on the old bonds, a reaction against Victorian ideas, and those who are up-to-date recognize this trend and try to keep in step with it. I don't mean you should become lax morally, but it certainly is better to keep an open mind, and when you are discussing something, not to lay down the law.

You also seem to be a little sorry for yourself. Perhaps that is the root of all the trouble. The majority of the earth's inhabitants have to "work for their spending money and clothes," you know. It is nothing to complain about. In fact, it's a pretty safe bet that it would not be good for them if they didn't.

You should put your mind to solving this problem, and then get some sort of outside hobby to fit in with it, preferably an athletic one, to take you outdoors and keep you fit and strong. Whatever you take up in that line will bring you into touch with others interested in the same thing, and there is the best possible chance to make friends.

The last letter this week I am leaving open for discussion. Tell us, other sailors and soldiers, have you had this experience? Tell us, girls, do you feel as this boy says the girls he meets feel? Tell us, anybody, what would you do if these things happened to you?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Two years ago I studied to be a radio operator and now have a year's experience. In the American Merchant Marine Library I've found an ALL-STORY and have just finished reading "Heart-to-Heart." Perhaps you'll answer a question or two for me?

Why do girls shun dates with a sailor or seaman, even when they've known him practically all his life, went to school together, played together as kids, yet when he comes in, though they don't mind his coming to their home, they refuse to be seen on the street with him? Why should one be judged by what others do? Suppose men judged all women by those seen along the water front of many cities?

In cities other than my home town I find it impossible to make friends and new acquaintances, for as soon as I mention that I'm a sailor my presence is no longer required. I like sports, shows, and dancing, as well as any one, and only a hermit likes to be alone.

A LONESOME SEAMAN.

The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I would love to join your Lonesome Club. I am a middle-aged lady of thirty-nine years, having two children. My husband is a traveling salesman and, of course, I never get to go any place with him, and I am very lonely. I wish that you can get me in touch with some nice congenial lady who is also lonely, and enjoys writing letters, for I love to receive lots of mail, and I also find great pleasure in writing letters to people all over the country. Hoping everything will be O.K.,

MRS. G. OF WASHINGTON, D. C.

I also would like to have some pen pals. I have real dark hair, brown eyes, and dark complexion. I am sixteen years old and like all sports, am also a movie fan. If you publish this I would like to have you sign my name

BABE.

I am a girl of seventeen, have medium blond hair, gray eyes, and am five feet two in height. I take care of my dad's office and things are very slow now, so all I do is read books. I want a lot of pen pals, so then during the day I could write letters. I think I could be very interesting, as I have done radio work and have taken part in many entertainments. I am a singer and dancer; I intend doing it professionally some day. So, there, you know that much about me; write and I have lots more to tell you. I will exchange photographs and will promise to answer all letters. So, come on, put the mailman to work. Everybody write to

A LONESOME LITTLE GIRL,
New York, N. Y.

I realize I'm not the only lonely girl in the wide world, but I'm writing in hope I'll be able to find some one to cease my loneliness. I am a young miss of nineteen, brown hair and eyes, and will let you decide the rest when we exchange snaps. Will welcome all letters with prompt answers.

BROWNY FROM MASS.

I would love to join your Lonely Club, and to have some pen pals. I am twenty-four, married, and have a darling baby boy six months old. I have brown hair and blue eyes, and weigh one hundred and fourteen. Not very tall—only five feet two. So I'll be waiting for loads of mail and promise to answer all who write.

CANUCK.

I am interested in your Lonesome Club, and would like to join it. I am a girl of sixteen,

with brown hair and eyes. I am five feet two and weigh one hundred and three. I love all kinds of sports, especially swimming. Will exchange photos with whoever writes to me. I will answer all letters at once, " so come on, girls." Hoping my mail box is full,

GINNY OF PA.

I live in a small town and am very lonesome, so would like to have loads and loads of pen pals. I am seventeen years of age, five feet three inches tall, have black curly hair, sky-blue eyes, light complexion, and weigh about one hundred and six. I am a true lover of all sports and especially of letter writing. I promise faithfully to answer all letters I receive and will exchange snapshots with anybody who wishes them.

STARLING OF CALIFORNIA.

I am a constant reader of ALL-STORY and think it is a wonderful book for young people to read. Won't some one please write to me, for I am very lonely, and always like to gain new friends? I'm a soldier, and have lots of boy friends, but not so many girl friends. I will gladly answer all letters that I receive, and will exchange photos. Please send photos when you write, if you wish to do so. I am twenty years of age, five feet ten, weigh one hundred and forty-five. Dark brown hair, blue-gray eyes, fair complexion, and a kind, loving disposition. I am a great lover of music, and of all I love Hawaiian music best. So come on, pals, and write to me, and I will surely answer all, if it takes until twelve every night.

LONELY IN BEAUTIFUL HAWAII.

I am very anxious to join your Lonesome Club. I am five feet two and have blond hair and blue eyes. I am interested in dancing and all sorts of sports. I am a junior in high school. I am anxious to hear from any one between the ages of sixteen and twenty. I love receiving letters and will answer all.

CUTIE OF ILLINOIS.

If there's room in the magazine, please put my article in it. I am a steady reader of ALL-STORY. I am so lonesome, and like to write letters. I am a girl sixteen years old, five feet three, and have brown hair and blue eyes. I love all kinds of sports, especially horseback riding. Would like friends from foreign countries, too. I promise to answer all letters and exchange snapshots. Good luck to ALL-STORY.

TOOTS OF MICHIGAN.

I am twenty-two, a junior in college, five feet eight, weigh one hundred and fifty-one, am considered handsome. My quality of college work is 1.85 (almost B average, or 85 per cent), and will teach next year. My parents are well off and live on a farm. I am not a good mixer in social activities, but am easy to get along with, and have to be made angry. My time is pretty well taken up, but will write to any one who wishes to write. Tell me your age, sex, education, wealth, and send a picture of yourself in first letter. I, too, would like to know your real name. My true first name is

ASA.

I am a young woman twenty-four years of age, weigh one hundred and twenty-five, am five feet five, with brown hair and blue eyes. Very sociable and easy to get along with. I play bridge very well, play piano a bit, like dancing, and enjoy going to a show. I go to business every day, am a stenog in a fire insurance office. If any one would care to correspond with me, I'll be pleased to answer all letters.

M. H. OF JERSEY.

I am looking for pen pals between the ages of nineteen and twenty-eight, so come on, write to me. I am nineteen, have blond curly hair, blue eyes, five feet two, and not so bad to look at. And do I like to write? Just try me and see. So I'm hoping to get my mail box filled with letters soon. I'll be waiting, so don't fail me.

BLONDIE OF KENTUCKY.

I am ill with appendicitis, and will probably be operated on soon, so I would like very much to have some pen pals while I'm in the hospital, for I will be very lonesome. This is very unusual for me to be sick, and is quite an experience. I have always been interested in all sorts of athletics, outdoors and indoors, and must give them all up for a while. I would like to hear from those interested in sports and between the ages of twenty and thirty.

I am dark-headed, but light-complexioned, have blue eyes, am about five feet and a half, and weigh one hundred and twenty-five. Any one who will write I will gladly exchange pictures with. Please some one write, for I love to get letters and answer them. I am cashier here at the hotel, and because I am so friendly, smiling or laughing most of the time, my friends call me

GIGGLES.

Wanted: All sorts of pen pals, age, looks, nationality make no difference. Come on, pen pals, I don't care if you're married or single, the more the merrier. I promise to answer every letter I receive.

JUST ME OF IOWA.

I would like to join your Lonesome Club, and will answer all letters from other members. I am eighteen years of age, five feet tall, light complexion, auburn hair, and weigh one hundred and six. I would like to hear from anybody from anywhere at or near my age.

SUSAN, NEW YORK.

I am writing to you about your Lonesome Club. I am a widow, middle-aged, quiet, refined, and good disposition. Being alone, with no one to take up my time and attention, I

pass many lonely hours. I would be grateful to you if you would put me in touch with persons of refinement who may be as lonely as I am, and I feel confident that the enjoyment derived from a pleasant correspondence would be mutual and possibly many bright and cheerful hours follow. FLORIDA.

I am looking for pen pals between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. I am single, twenty-one years old, height five feet ten and one-half, dark hair, weigh one hundred and fifty. Considered good-looking. Father is a dentist, and I am just a lonely young man. Let's get acquainted.

DOC OF MICHIGAN.

Having been a reader of your grand magazine for the past six months, I am writing to you in the hope of your doing me a great favor. I am hungry for want of correspondents overseas, and hope that it will not trouble you greatly to get a few fellow-readers to correspond with me. I am five feet ten, black hair, and am twenty-three years of age. (I don't know if you need this, but in case you do, you have it.)

I am fond of all outdoor sports, especially cricket, at which I have represented the Eastern Province. I am a shop assistant in a leather firm. Perhaps you may be interested to know the way I first read your magazine. A friend of mine was reading it one day, and I teased him about reading love stories, but later having nothing to read myself, I asked him for a book and he loaned one to me, with the result that I am now a confirmed reader. The news agency has my order. Well, best wishes, and long life and prosperity to this grand magazine. Forever a reader,

MICHAEL OF SOUTH AFRICA.

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free any original illustration in this issue. Just tell us which you liked best and inclose five coupons in your letter and the drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Let Him Win Me!.....

Anne Takes a Chance.....

Out of the Night.....

The Love Game.....

Hearts and Thrills.....

The Loyal Heart.....

His Now and Then Girl.....

Heaven, Unlimited .....

Miracle of Love.....

A True Love Story.....

The Unknown Knight.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)